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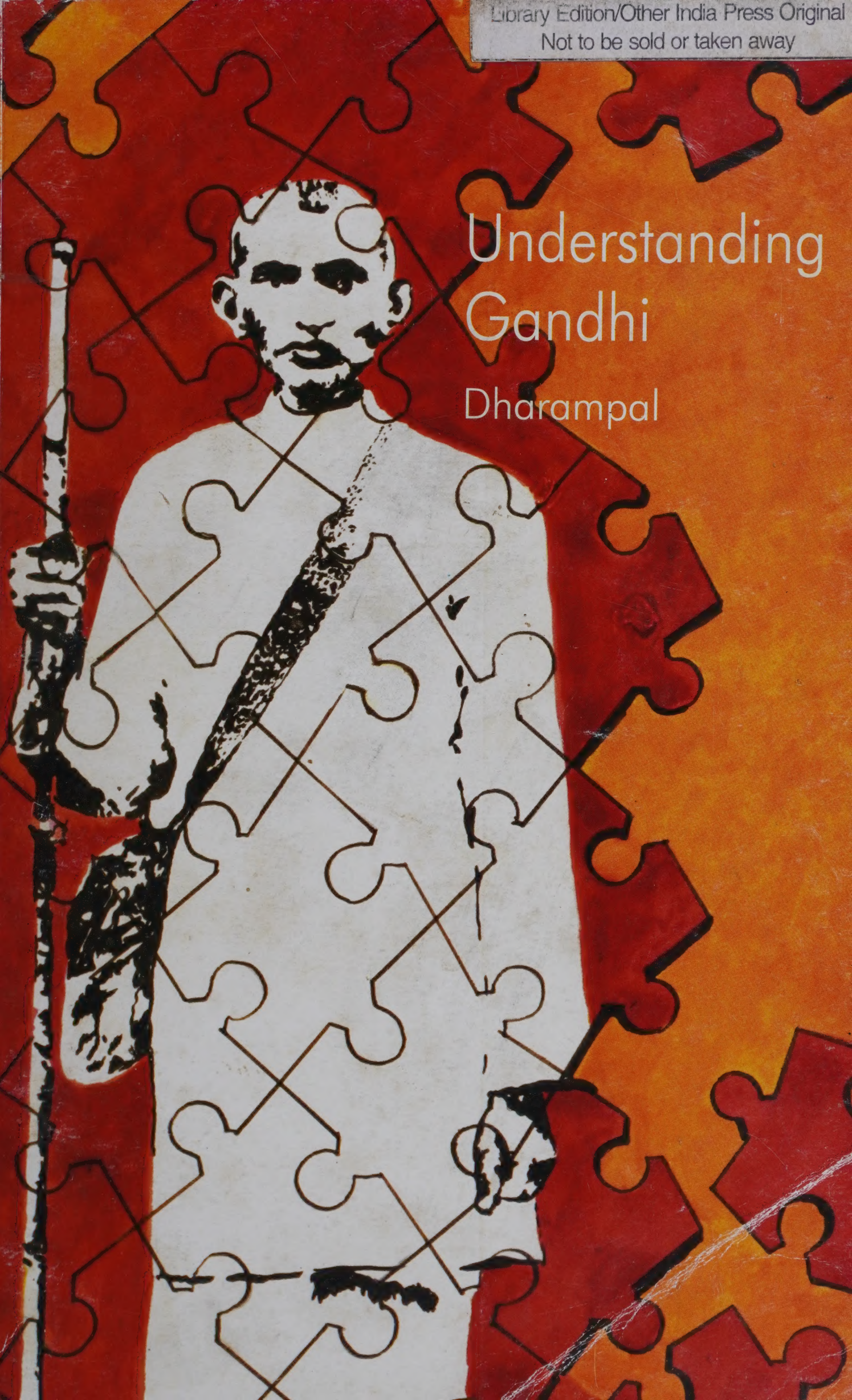

Understanding Gandhi

Dharampal

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by Dharampal

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— Dedication —

To the dear memory of my wife,
Phyllis

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The essay 'Sevagram – New Beginnings' is based on a conversation with Dharampal and was originally published in *Jansatta*, Delhi, October 2, 1986 as *Sevagram Se Phir Nai Shuruat Ho* by Jitendra Bajaj. The English translation is by Pawan Gupta and Anuradha Joshi.

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CHAPTER ONE

A child of the Gandhi era

BORN IN 1922, I consider myself a child of the Gandhian era as I spent the first twenty-five years of my life in Mahatma Gandhi's reign. The British were there, of course, but for us they were usurpers and oppressors. My first glimpse of Mahatma Gandhi was in December 1929 at the Lahore session of the Indian National Congress. I had gone there with my father who – like thousands of other young people at the call of Mahatma Gandhi – had abandoned his university education. Those were days of great excitement for me and many of my age (I was barely eight!). I may have seen Gandhiji again during the 1930s, but of this I have no clear recollection.

An event of great magnitude that I can recall from the memory of my childhood days was the hanging of Sardar Bhagat Singh by the British in early 1931. It created great anger amongst us.

There were many elderly people – including several religious and pious individuals – who held the opinion that we would not be able to do without the British and that we would be overrun by other foreign invaders if for some reason the British were no longer around. For this reason they felt we should remain loyal and obedient to them.

However, to most of us – whether we had seen him or not – Gandhiji was an *avatar,* come to liberate us from the oppression of a foreign ruler and to enable us to live once more in our own way.

My most vivid memory of Mahatma Gandhi is of seeing him over two full days – though from a distance – and listening to a two and a quarter hour speech that he made late in the evening on 8 August 1942. Millions of people in India as well as many in various parts of the world had been waiting to hear him speak. And so thousands heard him with rapt attention at the Gowalia tank maidan in Mumbai (on the occasion of the Quit India session of the All India Congress Committee). The speech itself is somewhat sketchily reported in the *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi.*[1] It needs to be published verbatim. If a film of the session exists, it should be closely studied, for it would recreate not only his words and his argument, but the expectations, emotions and fervour of the huge audience.

From about 1946 onwards, I saw Gandhiji many times, along with others. I sat near him sometimes and once – on being introduced to him by Susri Mirabehn – he even spoke a few words directly to me.

Any intimacy I had with Gandhiji arises thus from having lived in his times, being moved by the ideas, beliefs and emotions that welled up in me due to what he said and did, and in being fortunate to listen to that historic speech on the late evening of 8 August, 1942. This intimacy has in a sense continued in recent decades from having access to the actual text of what he said and wrote (compiled in the 100 volumes of the

Collected Works), or to what numerous other authors – beginning in 1909 with Joseph Doke's *Gandhi, An Indian Patriot in South Africa*[2] – have been writing about him now for over ninety years.

While the excitement of youth may have also contributed to my interest in public life and political ideas, it was largely the ideas and call of Gandhiji that led me – as it did countless others in India and elsewhere – to participate in the 'Quit India' Movement. Later on, in 1944, I happened to join Susri Mirabehn's newly started Kisan Ashram located midway between Roorkee and Haridwar. In the years following, I occupied myself with various similar matters, all with the vague idea of somehow participating in the overall regeneration of Indian society.

But as the years passed by, and especially by about 1960, I had got somewhat disenchanted – like several others – with our efforts in this direction. I had come to the conclusion that we in fact appeared to know very little about the society or the people about which we assumed we felt deeply concerned. It was perhaps a sheer accident – or may be the obsessive nature of the quest that I had acquired from my understanding of Gandhiji and of life in general as well – that brought me in the early sixties into intimate contact with our ordinary village people and the ways in which they functioned or thought. Other fortuitous circumstances allowed me to become familiar with the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries British and other European textual material that reported on the people of India and their institutions, particularly around the period 1800.

All this was some forty five years ago. Since then, while continuing to be engrossed in the textual narratives of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and with the life and society of people in India two hundred years ago, I have moved more and more to the sphere of what Gandhiji said and wrote. I find the two preoccupations connected in several significant ways.

When I first began poring over British archival records on India, I came across official British correspondence on a prolonged Indian protest against the imposition of a tax on dwelling houses in Varanasi and several other cities in Bihar and Bengal during the period 1810-1811. This research material made me feel quite strongly that I was reading about some major civil disobedience movement led by Mahatma Gandhi in our own times, and not about an event that had taken place over one hundred and fifty years ago. The information stimulated me to go through some of Mahatma Gandhi's writings all over again. I found references to earlier events of passive resistance in *Hind Swaraj*. Defining passive resistance in that book written by him in 1908, Gandhiji had observed :

> I remember an incident when, in a small principality, the villagers were offended by some command issued by the prince. The former immediately began vacating the village. The prince became nervous, apologized to his subjects and withdrew his command. Many such instances can be found in India. Real home rule is possible only where passive resistance is the guiding force of the people. Any other rule is foreign rule.[3]

The paragraph provided added authenticity to the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries material I was looking through at that time. I noticed similar perceptions expressed by Gandhiji on other major issues as well. In fact, it was a statement made by him in 1931 on the increase of illiteracy in India under British rule that led me to pay also greater attention to material on indigenous Indian education as it had functioned during the same period.[4]

In a speech during his visit to Britain in 1931 to attend the conference organised by the British government on Indian constitutional reforms, Gandhiji had taken the opportunity to comment on the extensive decay and decline of India during British rule. He had also on that occasion said that India had been more literate prior to British rule than it was at the time he was

speaking. The observation set me on a new path of research. From 1966 onwards I began collecting data pertaining to the state of education and literacy in India around 1800. By 1980 I had collected sufficient material that appeared to buttress Gandhiji's views. In the year that followed, while staying at the Sevagram Ashram of Mahatma Gandhi, I began organising this data in the form of a book on indigenous Indian education in the eighteenth century. As Gandhiji had referred to the earlier Indian education system as 'a beautiful tree', I retained this as the title of the new book.[5]

During the four months that I spent in Sevagram, I also happened to see some of the pre-1940 papers and proceedings of the Gandhi Seva Sangh.[6] I had known of the Sangh but only in an elementary way. Till I saw these papers and proceedings, I had no idea that the Sangh had undertaken in 1923 to promote, develop and spread the ideas and institutions proposed by Mahatma Gandhi or that it used to meet – during the period from 1934 to 1940 – in week-long annual conferences that gave rise to serious public debates. I came to discover that these annual conferences were accompanied by exhibitions and demonstrations on Indian craft and industry, and that at least twice – in 1936 and 1938 – even the production of iron and steel by the fairly widespread (and now famous) Indian method of manufacture was demonstrated at these exhibitions.[7]

In 1940, Gandhiji decided to suspend the activities of the Sangh as its powerful presence appeared to be dividing the Congress: modernizers like Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Sri Subhas Chandra Bose in fact wanted it to be wound up. He was happy if it could continue to function in future as an institute of research on ideas and institutions associated with him.[8]

This literature on the Gandhi Seva Sangh that had now come into my hands incited me to look for more material on these institutions. I even examined reports in some of the Indian newspapers of this period. Finally, in February 1982, I wrote a short narrative titled 'Restructuring Hind Swaraj: Mahatma Gandhi

in Action 1932-1940'. I was under some sort of compulsion at this time to put together what I had gathered and to communicate what I had learnt to others: the information – it appeared to me at least – had great public significance. A Hindi version of this article was published by the Hindi weekly *Dinman* shortly thereafter.[9] That essay is the first of the several pieces that finds place in this small book.

Having completed 'Restructuring Hind Swaraj', from 1982 onwards I wrote a few more essays on the life and work of Mahatma Gandhi based on my reading of parts of the *Collected Works*. These included: (i) 'Towards a Reappraisal of the Gandhian Era: An Approach' (July-September 1982); (ii) 'Society and Technology according to Mahatma Gandhi' (IIT, Kanpur, December 1982); (iii) 'Reconsidering Gandhiji: 1915-1948' (September 1984); (iv) 'Some Reflections on Mahatma Gandhi' (A Note for Comments, October-November, 1985); (v) 'The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi: A Note' (October 1986, published in part by the *Illustrated Weekly of India*); (vi) 'Sevagram – Possible New Beginnings' (A dialogue with J. K.Bajaj, originally published in Hindi in *Jansatta*, Delhi, as *Sevagram se phir nai shuruat ho,* on 2.10.1986); and (vii) *Sahas aur atma-samman, swayam-prairit smurudhi aur alipptata: Mahatma Gandhi par ek manan* (Pavnar, 12 February 1996).

The various chapters in this book are edited versions of the essays mentioned above. Some reorganizing of the material was called for in order to avoid needless repetition of facts and quotations, and to assemble together material dealing with similar issues in a single chapter rather than having it distributed across several. I hope this reorganisation will enable the reader to move from one aspect of Gandhiji's life and work to the next with greater clarity and ease.

II

The publication of *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* has been one of the major welcome achievements of modern India. This collation of Gandhiji's writings now comprises some 50,000 pages in one hundred volumes. The *magnum opus* provides in very large measure most of what Mahatma Gandhi said and wrote and includes over 30,000 letters, publicly spoken or dictated from about the age of eighteen upto the final day of his long and eventful life.

Gandhiji was a prolific and indefatigable writer. For example, from about 1906 up to 1948, he more or less continuously published one or more weekly papers.[10] Thus the material published by Gandhiji himself is fairly large. The hundred volumes of the *Collected Works* include three volumes of subject index, name index and the prefaces to the ninety-seven remaining volumes. These volumes are also being simultaneously published in Hindi and Gujarati (all Gandhiji's words are either in Gujarati, Hindi or English). Perhaps many of the states in India will bring out translations of the *Collected Works* in the other languages of India in future.

While the decision to bring out the *Collected Works* was taken in the early 1950s, the major work on this incomparable publishing enterprise has been done since about 1960. The people of India and the Indian nation must express their thanks and appreciation to Prof. K. Swaminathan and his numerous colleagues for the work and devotion they have put into this great task. Thousands of other individuals as well as institutions have also helped this monumental documentation by giving to the *Collected Works* organisation whatever they possessed with them written in Gandhiji's own hand. Without their cooperation the production of the *Collected Works* would have been an impossibility.

Despite the painstaking and meticulous nature of the effort, it would still have been a miracle if every word that Gandhiji

had uttered or written during his life was to be found included in these hundred volumes. There would be many records of what he wrote or of his public talks that have not survived to the present. Many other items existing here and there did not reach the editors and publishers of the *Collected Works*.

It is my firm impression that there is still a significant amount of what Gandhiji wrote that failed to reach the *Collected Works* organisation altogether. The major reason perhaps may have been that the *Collected Works* organisation – after some twenty years of constant hard work – felt too exhausted to attempt a second exploration, more or less on the lines of the first, that is, approaching various institutions and individuals once again for any additional material which they had acquired or discovered still in their possession since the first exploration was made. The other reason seems to be that individuals and perhaps, even institutions have so far not appreciated the necessity of getting what they retain in their possession included in the *Collected Works*.

A fresh effort to locate the remaining unpublished writings of Gandhiji and to have them included in the *Collected Works* is essential.

This observation apart, it bears reiteration that what has been achieved by the publication of *The Collected Works* is perhaps unique in the history of such gigantic undertakings, even if compared with other projects of a similar nature like the publication of the voluminous writings of people like Voltaire or the American philosopher Emerson. Few documents tell the story of India, its society and people – and the way the country was transformed from the period 1890 to 1948 – better than the *Collected Works*.

For instance, it is true we still feel concerned about the discrimination continued to be faced by the Depressed *Jatis* and by those described as 'other backward castes' today. But when compared with their status and condition till about 1940 they would be considered relatively better off in our times.

The same could be said about the status of girls and women, although in some respects – for example, the wilful elimination of the unborn female in the womb made possible by modern Western science – their condition has continually worsened since 1890. (According to Indian census data, we had an all-India average of 980 women to 1000 men in 1901, whereas this had actually worsened to 920 women to every 1000 men by 1991.)

The issue that now confronts us is the *use* of these hundred volumes and the millions of words they contain. At a recent meeting in Sevagram, an official of the Maharashtra Government observed that no one appeared to be interested in these volumes even when they were offered free to public libraries. The official may have been misinformed. Perhaps this is the situation in Maharashtra. It is also possible that the impressions gathered by the official from Maharashtra are shared by others in positions of authority in other parts of India.

Are the *Collected Works* then simply one more *samadhi*, only in this case constructed out of print and paper instead of stone and mortar? The way we have gone about the matter so far appears to confirm that we do indeed look upon these volumes as inert materials, similar to stone and mortar, or as museum pieces – like Gandhiji's watches, chappals, etc. – to be simply preserved as relics under secure lock and key. This is not to run down inert memorials like the statues of Gandhiji erected in public places. There is scope in future, for example, for a great temple of Bharatmata – built as a commemoration of this great and illustrious son of hers – in the style of the great Thanjavur or Chidambaram temples by indigenous Indian craftsmanship and from wholly local materials. In their own way, such monuments do have great value when erected to represent a great idea, some great moment in time, or to commemorate a great hero.

But as I see it, with the publication of the *Collected Works,* Gandhiji's approach to life and to the human condition acquire a deeper, universal and perennial meaning. No longer is he to

be treated as the mere originator of mass *satyagraha*, or as a great and heroic figure, even an austere *rishi* or the most illustrious son of India of the past two thousand years, a father to all or one of the most exemplary of men. He may have been all these but in the context of our times, in fact, in relation to human history, he would now have to be placed on par with Plato, or the great Gautam Buddha or Jesus of Nazareth or Confucius or the Chinese sage Lao Tse. At the least, his life and thought must be given as much serious study as Europe has given to the medieval church fathers, to Martin Luther, to Francis Bacon and Liebnitz and in more recent times, to Hegel and Karl Marx.

Even if we necessarily do not agree with everything that Gandhiji said or did, we ought to make a serious effort to appreciate his contributions in relation to every aspect of human endeavour. The disciplines of science, politics, economics, philosophy and psychology, theories of the organisation of society and the state, all must come to terms with his ideas or challenge his thought, words and deeds in as thorough and rigorous a manner as has been done by modern academics with the thought of the great Gautam Buddha, Confucius, and Plato, or, at a slightly different level, of Hegel and Karl Marx.

It is unfortunate that those who were close to him when he was alive – at least the few that had a certain claim to scholarship and a capacity for intellectual analysis – did not attempt to pinpoint the essence and the core of his approach. Such an exercise would have initiated a serious discussion of Gandhiji's ideas some thirty or more years earlier. Perhaps their own timidity and their own Bhadralok upbringings or a certain doubt that they retained till nearly the very end about the soundness of Gandhiji's logic or instincts or even the over-protectiveness that they quite naturally displayed towards him – or all of these elements together – appear to have made them poor analysts, and even poorer defenders of the man to whom they certainly had dedicated their all.

An illustration of this is to be found in Gandhiji's experiments in *brahmacharya*. These experiments that began from about 1906 – when he took his vow of celibacy – and increased in frequency from 1936 to 1947 have been largely misunderstood and misrepresented by both scholars as well as lay persons. This unfortunate result was largely a result of the timidity and confusion of the men who tried at times to act as his mentors, or at least as guardians of his reputation. These experiments of Gandhiji would have been far better understood and appreciated – even when people continued to disagree with them – if an article that he wrote about them in June 1938 had not been withdrawn from circulation due to the pressures of love and devotion exerted on him by his close devotees and by his secretariat. But in the context of what we then were, disoriented perhaps by prolonged political enslavement, and in constant fear of losing our moorings if the anchor – to which we held fast – was allowed to move as it liked, it was only natural that matters unfolded in the way they eventually did.

Even during his lifetime, the great masses of India's people who followed him in various ways – as when he gave the call of 'do or die' in 1942 – seem to have treated his ideas and methodologies (though not his person) rather mechanically. We, therefore, over-emphasised his constant reference to *Daridra-narayan*, his stress on the austere life, on treating the socially deprived and distressed as our very brothers and sisters, on the need for amity between groups of various kinds, etc and treated this as the sum total of his approach and philosophy. Some of the devout, even when he was alive, sincerely felt that the source of their newly acquired wealth was due to their following Mahatma Gandhi: did they not spin seven slivers of cotton daily, without fail, on the *charkha*?

This is not, however, to decry the life and work of the Gandhian ashrams and other institutions. In relation to what obtains in the totality of India what they do has both moral and material value. But to conclude that their life and work can

today be a model for the reshaping of Indian society is to ignore the present reality altogether.

The central point somehow got forgotten, perhaps more or less in the same way as the rather unthinking and sloganeering mind of the modern well-educated progressive seems to forget the original purpose which turned him to some revolutionary option. Two decades ago one of them, Tariq Ali, while reviewing a book on Mahatma Gandhi in a leading British newspaper described Gandhiji in the following words: 'Gandhi's real significance lay in his ability to both arouse the peasant masses of India and confiscate their social aspirations. It is this contradiction that helps explain his many eccentricities. In fact once we dispel the clouds of incense that surround Gandhi we can perceive him clearly: the mongrel offspring of Victorian liberalism and Indian mysticism.'

Such words may seem too jarring and would be considered unpardonable blasphemy by many in India and elsewhere. But basically the views which even modern Gandhians subscribe to, though couched in more reverent phraseology, have not been too dissimilar. Many among us seem to have got stuck with one or other personal fad in the name of Mahatma Gandhi: we take to an occasional ritual of cleaning of streets, or don *khadi*, or recite without any reflection what is known as the standard Gandhian prayer, as it had emerged by about 1944, and which, recited without reflection, is a mere jumble of words and utterances.

A few years ago, in Tamilnadu, when one of the principal leaders of the *khadi* and village industry enterprise was asked by a person of some patriotic standing why the indigenous old Indian *charkha* had altogether been abandoned in the State, he was given the reply that the old *charkha* required twenty times the number of ledger pages. In contrast, the whole idea of the stress on the *charkha*, as we well know, was to provide some little employment to as large a number as possible and not to ease the job of keeping accounts! To yet another question by

another Gandhian worker on how village industries' soap could be sold at such low prices in Tamilnadu, and whether this implied that such soap used animal fat instead of oils of vegetable origin, the response was, why is such a question being asked?

III

How does one really describe Gandhiji's life, the things that moved him most, the way he looked at the world, his own country, his people, the ideas he expressed and the institutions and programmes he devised to ensure they were implemented in practice?

In his autobiography, *The Story of my Experiments with Truth,* started on November 24, 1925, Mahatma Gandhi wrote, 'What I want to achieve, what I have been striving and pining to achieve these thirty years, is self realization, to see God face to face, to attain *moksha.*'[11] This intense desire to see God face to face seems to have gripped Gandhiji right from his boyhood days in Kathiawad and certainly after he began to live in South Africa from 1893.

The other major statement of this kind was made by Mahatma Gandhi in the form of *Hind Swaraj*, a small book in Gujarati written on the ship while he was returning from Britain to South Africa in November-December 1909.[12] In this older work (which we shall examine in greater detail in the following chapters), Gandhiji spelt out his ideas and views on the desirable society for India. He believed that till recent times India had had such a society; in fact, it still did so, and that this form of society made India superior to other civilisations, and certainly far preferable to modern Western civilisation. He found the simple organization and material life he described in *Hind Swaraj* conducive to human well-being and to the right natural balance.

A month or so before he wrote *Hind Swaraj* he had answered several questions in London on his ideas and on modern

Western civilisation, and had observed that much of the machinery and institutions of Western civilisation could be dismantled and discarded by people if they were determined to do so.[13]

Gandhiji must have had, in his early years, some indication of the widespread wreckage of Indian institutions, techniques and tools during British rule. He had a fairly vivid idea of the impoverishment and destitution of Indian life as a result of deliberate British policy. But he had also seen the great and willing response of his people to his message of courage, fearlessness and hope in South Africa, as well as in India, and the fact that they still retained their old manners and traditions. This led him to believe that the damage to India's spiritual and material life had not gone too deep and that the Indian people and their tools and institutions could, with the right support and encouragement, renew their feeling for a new and vigorous life.

That he may also have been conscious (quite early) of the capacity of Indians to resist injustice if they wanted to is also apparent from the very first article he wrote in 1891 for *The Vegetarian*, the journal of the London Vegetarian Society. In it, besides drawing attention to the heavy British tax on salt, which was depriving to a large extent the people of this essential commodity,[14] he also drew attention to the major movement against the slaughter of cows that was going on in India.[15] The anti-slaughter movement that Gandhiji was referring to was indeed a major event that had started prior to 1880. According to the British Viceroy writing in 1893, it was comparable to the efforts made by Indians to push the British out of India during 1857-58.[16] For Queen Victoria, this agitation against cow-slaughter was, in fact, aimed against the British and not at the Muslims.[17] Gandhiji was just 22 years old then.

But besides seeking *moksha* and his advocacy of *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhiji remained engaged in hundreds of other issues from dawn until late at night. It could perhaps be said that after he returned from London in 1891, he never really had a vacation.

It is these hundreds of things that he did, initiated, helped or advocated that link Mahatma Gandhi intimately with his times (and ours), and with the thousands and crores of people who came to him to do his bidding. It is true that each and everything he did had its roots in his aspiration to 'see God face to face' and in his vision of *Hind Swaraj*. But for him 'God is neither in heaven, nor down below, but in everyone' and his endeavour 'was to see God through service of humanity.'[18]

Gandhiji elaborated further on this in 1936 when he said: 'I am part and parcel of the whole, and I cannot find Him apart from the rest of humanity. My countrymen are my nearest neighbours. They have become so helpless, so resource-less, so inert, that I must concentrate on serving them. If I could persuade myself that I should find Him in a Himalayan cave, I would proceed there immediately. But I know that I cannot find Him apart from humanity.'[19]

In 1939 he was even firmer about this conviction and wrote, 'I claim to know my millions. All the 24 hours of the day I am with them. They are my first care and last, because I recognize no God except the God that is to be found in the hearts of the dumb millions. They do not recognize His presence. I do. And I worship the God that is Truth or Truth which is God through the service of these millions.'[20]

Gandhiji's presence and appeal seem to have generated confidence and courage in these millions. It made them come vibrantly alive after their long slumber and exhaustion. The manner in which this transformation came over the Indian people, earlier in South Africa, and from 1915 onwards at an accelerated pace in India, made it seem as if there were a regeneration of Indian life, and even of Indian tools and institutions. What only a little while earlier had appeared fatally damaged and in disrepair, in the presence of Gandhiji once again looked lively and functional. That even a *charkha* could not be found in Gujarat around 1916 indicates the extent of the decay and the wreckage of things Indian during the nineteenth century.

The essays that follow are mainly related to Gandhiji's social and political concerns about India and Indian society. The other – perhaps more important – aspects that moved him, like seeking God, *moksha*, man's quest for the deeper meaning of things, are hardly directly touched in this present attempt. So much has already been written on these latter aspects, and much more profoundly, that it does not seem right to discuss them here in an amateurish manner. For I must admit that my own understanding of them is no more than that of a lay person. Further, it seems to me that God, *moksha*, and man's quest for the deeper meaning of things are matters which have been perennial Indian concerns, and not much more can be said about them than has been said already by the ancient and latter *rishis*, scholars and teachers of India. Though Gandhiji was deeply spiritual and religious, his life and work, from 1891 to 1948, were far more concerned with the salvaging of the Indian and his/her society. He was convinced that this effort would restore the freedom of India and renew its land and environment. What is special about Gandhiji's effort is that both the attempt at salvage and the recovery of freedom were based on the spiritual view of life that he shared in a profound way with his ordinary fellow beings. It is this spiritual sharing that enabled him to help them regain their courage, fearlessness and confidence, and to resist injustice by trying, to the extent possible, to hold on to truth and to non-violence.

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CHAPTER TWO

Hind Swaraj

MAHATMA GANDHI wrote *Hind Swaraj* in 1909. He referred to it later as a booklet 'so simple as to be regarded foolish' and of which even thirty years later he would not 'revise a single idea'. *Hind Swaraj* was the product of Gandhiji's intense patriotism reinforced by his admiration for the civilisation of his country as he and innumerable other Indians of his time understood it. Undoubtedly he also drew support for what he wrote in *Hind Swaraj* from whatever knowledge and understanding he had acquired of other civilisations, from his own intuition and foresight and from the intellectual and spiritual confirmation that he received from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Western exponents of the simple, back-to-nature, life.

In his preface to the first Gujarati printing of *Hind Swaraj* (December 1909) Gandhiji wrote:

> These views are mine, and yet not mine. They are mine because I hope to act according to them. They are almost a part of my being ... (They) are, needless to say, held by many Indians not touched by what is known as civilisation, but I ask the reader to believe me when I tell him that they are also held by thousands of Europeans.[1]

A few months later, in March 1910, in the preface to the first English translation, he even declared that modern civilisation – as represented by the British Government in India – represented the kingdom of Satan, while the ancient civilisation of India, as he conceived it, represented the kingdom of God. The British represented the God of War, while the ancient Indian the God of Love. And he went on to add:

> My countrymen impute the evils of modern civilisation to the English people and, therefore, believe that the English people are bad, and not the civilisation they represent. My countrymen, therefore, believe that they should adopt modern civilisation and modern methods of violence to drive out the English. *Hind Swaraj* has been written in order to show that they are following a suicidal policy, and that, if they would but revert to their own glorious civilisation, either the English would adopt the latter and become Indianised or find their occupation in India gone.[2]

While the possession of *Hind Swaraj* was unlawful in India, it was accessible to, and therefore read by many outside India. To some of the latter who read it, the slim volume appeared to provide the impression that it engendered hatred for the British. This led Gandhiji to write another preface to the second Gujarati edition that was published in May 1914. Here he clarified his position: 'For myself, I am an uncompromising enemy of the present-day civilisation of Europe' and added:

> I have gathered an impression that, though *Hind Swaraj* does not advocate the use of physical force at any time and in any circumstances, and advocates always the use of soul-force to win the desired end, the result of its teaching has been to create hatred for the British and to suggest that they should

> be expelled through armed fighting or use of violence otherwise. I was unhappy to know this. Such was by no means my object in writing *Hind Swaraj*, and I can only say that those who have drawn from it the foregoing conclusion have totally failed to understand the book. I, for one, bear no ill-will against the British or against any people or individuals. All living creatures are of the same substance as all drops of water in the ocean are the same in substance.[3]

Being an intensely practical person – yet one intent always on remaining steadfast to his vision – Gandhiji appeared to contradict himself time and again, especially when it came to decisions that had to be made in real life. In the new preface to the fourth Indian (1921) edition of *Hind Swaraj*, he found himself compelled to declare:

> I would warn the reader against thinking that I am today aiming at the Swaraj described therein. I know that India is not ripe for it. It may seem an impertinence to say so, but such is my conviction. I am individually working for the self-rule pictured therein. But today my corporate activity is undoubtedly devoted to the attainment of parliamentary Swaraj in accordance with the wishes of the people of India [evidently as reflected in the views of the then Indian national political leadership – *D*]. I am not aiming at destroying railways or hospitals, though I would certainly welcome their natural destruction ... Nor am I aiming at a permanent destruction of law courts, much as I regard it as a 'consummation devoutly to be wished for'. Still less am I trying to destroy all machinery and mills. It requires a higher simplicity and renunciation than the people are today prepared for.[4]

How Gandhiji himself viewed such apparent contradictions is best illustrated by his 1939 article, 'The Unbridgeable Gulf'. The article came in response to a reader's comment on an earlier article, 'Is India a military country?' that Gandhiji had published in *Harijan* and that had concluded in the following manner:

> Nor do I contemplate without uneasiness the prospect of Indian soldiers, trained after the modern manner, taking the motor spirit to their homes. Speed is not the end of life. Man sees more and lives more truly by walking to his duty.
>
> (On the train to Simla, September 25, 1939.)[5]

This brought a rejoinder from a reader who thought that the information given at the end of the article ('On the train to Simla') in fact ridiculed the statement made by Gandhiji just before it ('Man sees more and lives more truly by walking to his duty').

Gandhiji defended himself:

> I must deprive the ridicule of its sting by informing my friend that I was in my senses when I wrote the note referred to. I might easily have avoided the exact place where it was penned (i.e., 'On the train to Simla'). But I wanted to add point to my remark and to discover to the reader the vast gulf that separates me from my ideal ... If I am to make an ever increasing approach to my ideal I must let the world see my weaknesses and failures so that I may be saved from hypocrisy and so that even for very shame I would try my utmost to realise the ideal. The contradiction pointed out by the friend also shows that between the ideal and practice there always must be an unbridgeable gulf. The ideal will cease to be one if it becomes possible to realize it. The pleasure lies in making the effort, not in its fulfillment. For in our progress towards the goal we ever see more and more enchanting scenery.[6]

He went on to add:

> Coming, however, to the friend's gibe let me tell him and the reader that I could pen those lines because it is never a pleasure to me to travel by motor or rail or even a cart. It is always a pleasure to walk. Nor should I mind in the least if every rail was removed and men, except the sick and the maimed, had to walk to their businesses. I cannot only imagine but am working for a civilisation in which possession of a car will be considered no merit and railways will find no

> place. It would not be for me an unhappy event if the world became once more as large as it used to be at one time.
>
> *Hind Swaraj* was written in 1909. Since then it has undergone many editions and has been translated in many languages of the world. I was asked last year by Shrimati Sophia Wadia to write a foreword for the edition that she was bringing out. I had the pleasure therefore, of having to reread it carefully. The reader may know that I would not revise a single idea. I had no desire to revise the language. It is a fair translation of the original in Gujarati. The key to understand that incredibly simple (so simple as to be regarded foolish) booklet is to realise that it is not an attempt to go back to the so-called ignorant, dark ages. But it is an attempt to see beauty in voluntary simplicity, poverty and slowness. I have pictured that as my ideal. I shall never reach it myself and hence cannot expect the nation to do so. But the modern rage for variety, for flying through the air, for multiplicity of wants, etc., have no fascination for me. They deaden the inner being in us. The giddy heights which man's ingenuity is attempting, take us away from our Maker who is nearer to us than the nails are to the flesh which they cover. Therefore, even whilst I am traveling at the rate of 40 miles per hour, I am conscious that it is a necessary evil, and that my best work is to be done in little Sevagram containing 700 souls, and in the neighbouring villages to which I can walk. But being a highly practical man I do not avoid railway travelling or motoring for the mere sake of looking foolishly consistent.[7]

If we look at the correspondence that took place between Gandhiji and Jawaharlal Nehru during the months of October and November 1945 on the direction emergent India should take – a correspondence that clearly shows the gulf that divided them[8] – it is obvious that the Mahatma held to this exposition of his views made in his 1939 article till the very end.

Besides its rather breathtaking demolition of modern Western civilisation, what *Hind Swaraj* essentially provides is a vision of the 'desirable society' that Gandhiji yearned for and

the rules and self-discipline that were necessary to bind it together. Any striving to move in the direction of this society could be undertaken only if one were able to spell out and demonstrate the processes which led to it or at least outline the intermediate stages on the way. Gandhiji's own life – what he did, and more importantly, the manner and the process of his striving – seems to be the only guide and handbook that we have to this vision of the desired society.

While the years 1919 to 1931 may be seen as the period during which the Indian people made it clear to themselves, to the British and to the world at large that the struggles that they had launched against British rule under the leadership and guidance of Mahatma Gandhi were distinctly leading towards political independence, the phase beginning in 1933 and continuing with full vigour till 1940, may be seen as Gandhiji's attempt to provide the content and structure such political independence would assume (basically on the premises visualized by him in *Hind Swaraj*). That for various complex reasons this attempt largely got aborted makes it even more imperative that more is known and understood (through research and study, as well as reflection) about this period.

In August 1933 Gandhiji formally dissolved the Sabarmati Ashram that he had set up in 1915 on the banks of the river of the same name near Ahmedabad. He donated its premises and assets to the newly created Harijan Sevak Sangh. Some weeks later, at the age of sixty-four, he began his year long whirlwind Harijan tour to convince the people of India that the depressed groups in India had to be treated as equals and that all their civic rights – including entry to temples – must be restored to them. At the end of this tour in mid 1934, Gandhiji made Wardha his new and last centre, moving six miles away to Sevagram a year later. About the same time Gandhiji took the momentous decision of formally resigning his membership of the Indian National Congress whose supreme leader and guide he had been since 1920. Before his resignation was accepted,

Gandhiji assured the Congress that his advice and guidance should still be available to it. On Gandhiji's advice, the Congress at this time decided to make itself more truly representative of India by adopting the rule that henceforth three-quarters of the members of its National Committee would come from rural India and only one-quarter from the urban areas.[9] The Congress further resolved that as 'village reorganisation and reconstruction necessarily implies the revival and encouragement of dead or dying village industries,' an All-India Village Industries Association should be set up under the advice and guidance of Gandhiji. Within weeks of the formation of the Association, the British Government of India decided it was highly dangerous and seditious. This proved to be also the perception of the Viceroy.[10]

The various events recounted above may seem unrelated to each other, but in fact they are deeply interconnected and interwoven.

In a sense, this new phase began in 1932 itself when Gandhiji decided to undertake his 'epic' fast to protest against British proposals to separate the 'depressed classes' on a statutory basis from the rest of the Hindus. The announcement of the fast – while it perplexed many, especially the progressives and the intellectuals amongst the Indian Nationalists – galvanized all India as never before in living memory. Within a few days of its commencement, matters were so speedily resolved between the representatives of the 'depressed classes' and the rest of the Hindus – and accepted by the British as well – that it could be ended successfully. At this time, an historic assemblage of the Hindus meeting in Bombay on September 25, 1932 further resolved:

> That henceforth, amongst Hindus, no one shall be regarded as an untouchable by reason of his birth, and that those who have been so regarded hitherto will have the same right as other Hindus in regard to the use of public wells, public schools, public roads and all other public institutions.

And

> that it shall be the duty of all Hindu leaders to secure, by every legitimate and peaceful means, an early removal of all social disabilities now imposed by custom upon the so-called untouchable classes, including the bar in respect of admission to temples.[11]

A few months later, even the Sanatana Dharma Mahasabha (of the Hindus) meeting at Varanasi, consisting of orthodox learned pundits expressed the opinion 'that as the depressed classes are followers of the Sanatana Dharma, it is the duty of the other followers of the said Dharma to help them enjoy the full benefits of following that Dharma.'[12]

Gandhiji's 1932 fast against untouchability seems to have given him a new insight. As he observed later (in 1934), 'the campaign against untouchability has begun to imply ever so much more than the eradication of the ceremonial untouchability of those who are labeled untouchables. For the city dweller, the villagers have become untouchable.'[13] Therefore it was to overcome this wider untouchability that the revival of village industries became even more urgent.

The consequences of Gandhiji's fast, and the steps taken by him, were thus momentous. It is not surprising to learn therefore that when the British Secretary of State for India in December 1942 expressed the view that there were 'politically very considerable advantages' in having the 'depressed classes' as another substantial minority to checkmate Mahatma Gandhi and the Congress, his own office thought differently and felt 'it is a weaker card than the Moslem one, naturally so in view of Gandhi's work on the untouchables.'[14]

By the time he formally resigned from the Indian National Congress in October 1934, Gandhiji appeared to be already convinced that the political independence of India from Britain had by then become a certainty, that the waiting and the struggle for it were no longer a question of generations. He therefore began to be far more concerned about the content

and structure of India's governance vis-a-vis its people and traditions in the post-independence period. Realizing, however, that 'I seem to be going in a direction just opposite to what many of the most intellectual Congressmen would gladly and enthusiastically take, if they were not hampered by their unexampled loyalty to me,' he decided that 'for me any more to draw upon this loyalty and devotion is to put undue strain upon them.' He also confessed that 'a very large body of Congress intelligentsia were tired of my method and views, they felt that I was a hindrance rather than a help to the natural growth of the Congress,' and his remaining in it made them think that 'there was no free play of reason.' According to Gandhiji, the most intellectual of them differed with him on hand-spinning, which was to him 'the hand-maid of agriculture', and the 'nation's second lung'; on his concerning himself with the elimination of untouchability; on the occasions and mode of civil disobedience; on non-violence; in fact, on the content of democracy itself. Thus the wide disparity in perspective between the Congress and himself also contributed to Gandhiji's decision to formally resign from the Congress.

From 1934 onwards till the last day of his life, and much more so during the years from 1934 to 1940 – during which he did not need to lead any civil disobedience movements against British rule – Gandhiji devoted every available moment to provide content and structure to his ideas of Swaraj and democracy.

To Mahatma Gandhi, Swaraj (independence, self-rule) was not to be perceived as a straight rod, but 'rather like a banyan tree.' Like the banyan, it had 'innumerable branches, each of which is as important for the tree as the original trunk. Feeding any of these means feeding the tree. Nobody can lay down a rule as to which of the branches should be fed when; circumstances determine that.'[15]

In July 1946 he visualized Swaraj democracy to be 'an oceanic circle whose center will be the individual always ready to

perish for the village, the latter ready to perish for the circle of villages, till at last the whole becomes one life composed of individuals, never aggressive in their approach but ever humble sharing the majesty of the oceanic circle of which they are integral units.'[16] According to him, 'In this structure, composed of innumerable villages (and obviously towns and cities), there will be ever widening, never ascending circles'; and, 'the outermost circumference will not wield power to crush the inner circle but will give strength to all within and derive its own strength from them.'[17]

Attempts to eradicate untouchability, reducing the gulf between village and city, reviving village industries, led to even greater realisation of the uselessness, in fact, the destructive nature of the prevailing British-structured education system and efforts to seek its replacement by what was more appropriate at all levels. This, as a first step, was to lead to what is known as Gandhiji's system of 'basic education'.

The initiation, deliberation, and projection of all these ideas required a forum, a group of like-minded persons themselves engaged in a variety of pursuits. This function was performed by the Gandhi Seva Sangh, initially created in 1923 to promote the programmes placed before the country by Gandhiji, and reconstituted and widened to include a membership of hundreds when Gandhiji made Wardha his new center.[18] Gandhiji then wrote: 'The Gandhi Seva Sangh is framing a new constitution. It has decided to incur no fresh obligations. It will enlist workers who hold common ideals without needing to have a common purse.'[19] These workers included writers, educationists, scientists, technologists, medical men, social workers, *sanyasis* and scholars, and people actively engaged in the Indian national movement against foreign rule.

Gandhiji also thought of organising labour in such a manner that there would be 'no strikes' and 'no class war'. A leading Indian newspaper even made this latter idea its lead story of the day with banner head lines adding that the new labour

organization's 'Workers (were) to be trained by Gandhi Seva Sangh'.[20]

Thus from 1934 till the beginning of 1940, Gandhiji seems to have applied himself, along with members of the Sangh, and countless others, to thoughts concerning the approaches, institutions and structure which seemed to them required for the functioning of the new India. Further, as this was no isolated task, the members of the Sangh were permitted not only to be members of the Indian Congress but also, with the Sangh's specific permission, allowed to stand for election to the new legislatures, whenever locally necessary. For, as Gandhiji said to them in 1936, 'there was no absolute division between the so-called political and the so-called constructive programmes. In our method of work there are no watertight compartments.'[21] Earlier in January 1933 he had asked a correspondent, 'Why do you believe that Swaraj is something apart from the eradication of untouchability?'

The beginning of the war in Europe in September 1939 led to a dramatic change in the Indian political situation. A clash between Indian nationalism and British authority seemed imminent. Gandhiji was compelled to devote himself full-time to political affairs once again. Additionally, a complex of other factors led Gandhiji, in February 1940, to advise the Gandhi Seva Sangh to restrict itself to being a holding committee[22] hoping at the same time that it would, without participating in politics, 'become a postgraduate school or research organization' to deliberate upon and work on the kind of structures, relationships and polity with which he himself, and the Gandhi Seva Sangh as a body, had been concerned in the previous six years.[23]

Gandhiji's political and economic ideas were generally considered impractical – or, more gently stated – utopian. That opinion may continue to persist well into the twenty-first century. Yet, even this view cannot be affirmed with any certitude till his ideas are examined on the basis of adequate information, knowledge, understanding and experiment. Unfortunately this

has not happened. To an extent it did not happen because India itself opted for a different road. Moreover, till recently, the material relevant to this period – *The Collected Works*, the British Government archives and the private papers from this period – was just not available. Now that much of it is, research by those interested in gaining a deeper understanding of his ideas may become a valuable and rewarding task.

REFERENCES:

1. *Collected Works*, Vol.10, pp.-7, preface to *Hind Swaraj*, 22.11.1909
2. *Collected Works*, Vol.10, pp.188-90, from *Indian Opinion*, 2.4.1910
3. *Collected Works*, Vol.12, pp.411-2, from *Indian Opinion*, 24.4.1914
4. *Collected Works*, Vol.19, pp.277-8, from *Young India*, 261.1921
5. *Collected Works*, Vol.70, pp.201-2
6. *Collected Works*, Vol.70, pp.241-3, from *Harijan*, 14.10.1939
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Collected Works*, Vol.81, pp.319-12, Gandhiji to Nehru, 5.10.1945; J. Nehru: *Selected Works*, Vol. 14, pp.554-7, J. Nehru to Gandhiji, 4.10.1945
9. D.G. Tendulkar, *Mahatma*, Vol.39, p.371 (1952)
10. IOR:L/P&J/7/663: Government of India, Home Dept to all local Governments, dated 23.11.1934 (F/3/16/34, 7 pp, 23 paras) on 'Situation arising out of the decisions of the recent Bombay Congress'. Also Viceroy Willingdon to Samuel Hoare, Secretary of State for India. On 11 November 1934 Willingdon wrote, 'I am inclined to think that his (Gandhiji's) real purpose in this village uplift scheme of his is to get the Congress ideas into the minds of all the agriculturists of the country and then he can restart again with redoubled vigour ... I think this is going to increase our difficulties in the future because with Congress fairly strong in the Assembly and Gandhi doing his propaganda work outside he will have a dual policy with which to upset us in the future.' However, the letter somehow leaked out and the Government was forced to a debate on it in the Central Legislative Assembly. Referring to it Willingdon wrote to Hoare on 21.1.1935, 'We are going to have a very troublesome time too in the Assembly. The Congress have got hold of that memorandum which we issued from the Home Department with

regard to Gandhi's village uplift scheme, and they hope to make much capital out of it.' (IOR:MSS Eur E 240/8).

11. *Harijan*, published at the top of the front page of most issues in 1933.
12. *Harijan*, 18.2.33, mentioned in letter of Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya dated 8.2.1933 to Gandhiji.
13. Tendulkar, *Mahatma*, Vol 4, p.2.
14. IOR:L/ P&J./8/685:\Depressed classes: General Papers, p.101, office noting dated 31.12.1942. Earlier, on 16.12.1942 Secretary of State Amery had written to the Viceroy Linlithgow, 'I read Ambedkar's letter and memorandum about the grievances of the scheduled castes enclosed in your letter of November 21st. It does seem to me as if it would be well worthwhile giving them a substantial leg up and assimilating their position increasingly to that of the Moslems. There are, after all, politically very considerable advantages in having two substantial minorities to whom consideration has to be paid, and not to be put in the position of being merely labelled pro-Moslem and anti-Hindu.'
15. *Collected Works*, Vol.52, p.399-400, letter dated 8.1.1933 to Parmananda K. Kapadia.
16. *Harijan*, 28.7.1946, pp.236-7, article titled 'Independence'.
17. *Ibid.*
18. After Gandhiji settled down in Wardha in 1934 (and then moved to Sevagram in the summer of 1936) the Gandhi Seva Sangh began to function more actively and with a much broader base. After its reorganisation the first major conference of the Sangh was held in Wardha in November 1934. The second conference was held at Savli (Feb-March 1936), the third at Hudli (16-20.4.1937), the fourth at Delang, Orissa (March 1938) the fifth at Brindavan, Bihar (3-7.5.1939), and the sixth – when it was decided to reduce the Sangh to a small holding committee – at Malikanda, Bengal (Feb 1940). The proceedings of the conferences were published by the Sangh, and the conferences as such, especially from 1937 onwards, were prominently covered in the newspapers. The later conferences were also noticed in the fortnightly (Government) intelligence reports from the provinces, and may have been more extensively covered by intelligence agencies of the Government of India.
19. *Collected Works*, Vol.59, pp.424-5, letter dated *5.12.1934* to N.R.Malkani.
20. *Hindustan Times*, 30.3.1938, p.1.
21. Tendulkar, *Mahatma*, Vol.4, p.66.
22. It was not only the British authorities who looked askance at the post 1934 functioning of the Gandhi Seva Sangh. Within the Sangh itself there seem to have been several tangential views about its role. Outside also it did not find

favour with men like Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Shri Subhash Chandra Bose. Nehru expressed his unhappiness about the Sangh interesting itself in politics perhaps many times. On 28.4.1938 he also expressed his great distress about it in a letter to Gandhiji. Gandhiji then (7.5.1938) asked him, 'What is it in the new orientation of the Gandhi Seva Sangh that has disturbed you? I must own that I am responsible for it. I should like you to tell me unhesitatingly what has disturbed you. If I have erred, you know that I shall retrace my steps as soon as I discover the error.' While it is not known what happened about Pandit Nehru's distress thereafter, the Sangh a year later again reaffirmed the stance which the *Times of India* (8.5.1939) headlined as 'Gandhi Seva Sangh to take part in politics', and the *Hindustan Times* (7.5.1939) as 'Seva Sangh members may enter politics, but Gandhian principles must be adhered to.' Shri Subhash Bose was even more direct in his opposition to the political role of the Sangh. *The Times of India* (4.5.1939) reported him as saying, 'It may be argued by our critics that the formation of a Forward Bloc will cause a split in the Congress and destroy national unity. Did the formation of the Gandhi Seva Sangh create a split and destroy national unity? If it did not, then why should the formation of the Forward Block do so? ... It is no exaggeration to say that the Gandhi Seva Sangh is the only well organised and disciplined political party among Indian nationalists.'

23. Tendulkar, *Mahatma*, Vol.5, p.303. That for Gandhiji the Sangh was still very much alive is indicated by his letter of March 12, 1940 to Shrikrishnadas Jaju (within a few weeks of his advising the Sangh to reduce itself to a holding committee). He still felt that the auspices of the Gandhi Seva Sangh were the proper one to deliberate on basic issues. The four issues which he then thought required research were: '(1) The problem of how to popularise *khadi*, etc, is there, no doubt. (2) Is there any necessary connection between village crafts like spinning etc., and *ahimsa*? If there is, what is the nature of that connection? (3) What are the crafts which cannot be carried on without *ahimsa*? And what are the ones in which violence is unavoidable? Or is there no such distinction? (4) Does India have any special gift in regard to *ahimsa*?'

CHAPTER THREE

On technology

In September 1945, the working committee of the Indian National Congress devoted itself to an intense discussion on the shape that India's polity should assume after the departure of the British. The discussion appears to have been a heated one, even somewhat acrimonious at times. As Mahatma Gandhi was participating in the meeting, the acrimony naturally would have been kept within reasonable bounds. The debate, however, exercised Gandhiji greatly and a few days later he expressed his concern in a letter to Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. As what Gandhiji said in this letter is still relevant to our times, I may be forgiven for quoting from it at some length. Gandhiji wrote:

> I take first the sharp difference of opinion that has arisen between us. If such a difference really exists people should also know about it, for the work of Swaraj will suffer if they

are kept in the dark. I have said that I fully stand by the kind of governance which I have described in *Hind Swaraj*. It is not just a way of speaking. My experience has confirmed the truth of what I wrote, in 1909. If I were the only one left who believed in it, I would not be sorry for I can only testify to the truth as I see it. I have not *Hind Swaraj* in front of me. It is better that I redraw the picture today in my own language. Then it would not matter to me whether or not the picture tallies with that of 1909, nor should it to you. I do not have to establish what I had said before. What is worth knowing is only what I have to say today.

I believe that if India, and through India the world, is to achieve real freedom, then sooner or later we shall have to go and live in the villages – in huts, not in palaces. Millions of people can never live in cities and palaces in comfort and peace. Nor can they do so by killing one another, that is, by resorting to violence and untruth. I have not the slightest doubt that, but for the pair, truth and non-violence, mankind will be doomed. We can have the vision of that truth and non-violence only in the simplicity of the villages. That simplicity resides in the spinning-wheel and what is implied by the spinning wheel. It does not frighten me at all that the world seems to be going in the opposite direction. For the matter of that, when the moth approaches its doom it whirls round faster and faster till it is burnt up. It is possible that India will not be able to escape this moth-like circling. It is my duty to try till my last breath, to save India and through it the world from such a fate. The sum and substance of what I want to say is that the individual person should have control over the things that are necessary for the sustenance of life. If he cannot have such control the individual cannot survive. Ultimately, the world is made up only of individuals. If there were no drops there would be no ocean. This is only a rough and ready statement. There is nothing new in this.

But even in *Hind Swaraj* I have not said all this. While I appreciate modern thought, I find that an ancient thing, considered in the light of this thought looks so sweet. You will

> not be able to understand me if you think that I am talking about the villages of today. My ideal villages still exist only in my imagination. After all, every human being lives in the world of his own imagination. In this village of my dreams the villager will not be dull, he will be all awareness. He will not live like an animal in filth and darkness. Men and women will live in freedom, prepared to face the whole world. There will be no plague, no cholera and no smallpox. Nobody will be allowed to be idle or to wallow in luxury. Everyone will have to do body labour. Granting all this, I can still envisage a number of things that will have to be organized on a large scale. Perhaps there will even be railways and also post and telegraph offices. I do not know what things there will not be. Nor am I bothered about it. If I can make sure of the essential thing, other things will follow in due course. But if I give up the essential thing, I give up everything.[1]

At the heart of the above discussion lay a single issue: what was to be the pattern of development that India would follow after independence? Should it be the Western model, as exemplified by the British in India and adopted throughout the Western world or should it be the indigenous pattern perfected in this country and based on the wisdom of the past.

In *Hind Swaraj* Gandhiji had in clear terms expressed the view that modern Western civilisation and its various works – including its technology – were Satanic in their nature[2] and were conducive neither to man's happiness and dignity nor his seeking of the self. Western civilisation instead, according to him, negated all human and moral values and tended to reduce life to meaninglessness. Notwithstanding his voluminous writings between the years 1909 and 1945 – a period of thirty-six years[3] – *Hind Swaraj* remained for him till the very end his great testament.

What Gandhiji advocated in *Hind Swaraj* was an alternative view on life. As he perceived it, till the British conquest of India and the subversion of its values and society, Indian society was largely based on the ideas of 'performance of duty and ob-

servance of morality' for attaining 'mastery over our mind and our passions'. A society founded on such principles, in his view, led to man knowing himself – the supreme desirable goal of every individual human being. But Gandhiji also believed that man could not live without society. Elaborating on the manner in which society in India was organised, Gandhiji wrote in *Hind Swaraj*:

> I believe that the civilisation India has evolved is not to be beaten in the world. Nothing can equal the seeds sown by our ancestors. Rome went, Greece shared the same fate; the might of the Pharaohs was broken; Japan has become westernized; of China nothing can be said; but India is still, somehow or other, sound at the foundation. The people of Europe learnt their lessons from the writings of the men of Greece and Rome, which exist no longer in their former glory. In trying to learn from them, Europeans imagine that they will avoid the mistakes of Greece and Rome. Such is their pitiable condition. In the midst of all this India remains immovable and that is her glory. It is a charge against India that her people are so uncivilized, ignorant and stolid, that it is not possible to induce them to adopt any changes. It is a charge really against our merit. What we have tested and found true on the anvil of experience, we dare not change. Many thrust their advice upon India, and she remains steady. This is her beauty; it is the sheet-anchor of our hope.[4]

Coming to technology and the professions (discussing science perhaps was not yet a fashion in 1909), Gandhiji felt that India had 'nothing to learn from anybody else.' According to him, 'the more we indulge in our passions the more unbridled they become.'[5] Hence Indian culture and tradition had set a limit to man's indulgences because it 'saw that happiness was largely a mental condition.'[6]

In *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhiji stated,

> So many writers have shown [that India] has nothing to learn from anybody else, and this is as it should be ... The more we indulge our passions, the more unbridled they become.

> Our ancestors, therefore, set a limit to our indulgences. They saw that happiness was largely a mental condition ... It was not that we did not know how to invent machinery, but our forefathers knew that, if we set our hearts after such things, we would become slaves and lose our moral fibre. They, therefore, after due deliberation decided that we should only do what we could with our hands and feet. They saw that our real happiness and health consisted in a proper use of our hands and feet. They further reasoned that large cities were a snare and a useless encumbrance.[7]

Elaborating further on the technological aspect, he observed:

> It was not that we did not know how to invent machinery, but our forefathers knew that, if we set our hearts after such things, we would become slaves and lose our moral fibre. They, therefore, after due deliberation decided that we should only do what we could with our hands and feet. They saw that our real happiness and health consisted in a proper use of our hands and feet. They further reasoned that large cities were a snare and a useless encumbrance and that people would not be happy in them, that there would be gangs of thieves and robbers, prostitution and vice flourishing in them and that poor men would be robbed by rich men. They were, therefore, satisfied with small villages. They saw that kings and their swords were inferior to the sword of ethics, and they, therefore, held the sovereigns of the earth to be inferior to the Rishis and the Fakirs.
>
> A nation with a constitution like this is fitter to teach others than to learn from others. This nation had courts, lawyers and doctors, but they were all within bounds. Everybody knew that these professions were not particularly superior; moreover, these Vakils and Vaids did not rob people; they were considered people's dependents, not their masters. Justice was tolerably fair. The ordinary rule was to avoid courts. There were no touts to lure people into them. This evil, was noticeable only in and around capitals. The common people lived independently and followed their agricultural occupation. They enjoyed true Home Rule.[8]

Around 1920 Gandhiji began to advocate the revival of hand-spun and hand-woven cloth (*khaddar*, or *khadi*) and its use by all congressmen and others in the country. Within a few years, *khadi* in fact became 'the livery of freedom' and was donned with pride even by men who had hitherto been accustomed to great luxury and habituated to the wearing of silks and muslins. The success of this effort can be judged by the fact that within three months of the adoption of this programme by the Congress i.e. by mid 1921, two million *charkhas* (spinning wheels) had been distributed in good working order to the spinners all over India.

Gandhiji's basic idea in promoting the adoption of khadi and village industries as essential economic activities was that the people at large should be informed and should participate in public affairs. In the beginning, the major argument made for reverting to the production and use of *khadi* was that using mill-made cloth impoverished our people, that we were losing sixty crores of rupees – a substantial part of our national income – annually on it and that the abandonment of hand-spinning and weaving had made most of our women and great weavers, as well as those engaged in various processes related to the making of *khadi*, destitute.[9]

Gandhiji pursued this argument for some time, but in 1925 he re-worked it now declaring that the question of this loss of sixty crores annually and even the state of extreme poverty, though grim, were of secondary importance. What was worse was that we as a people, after being subjugated by the British, had by long habit become indolent. We had lost the sense of togetherness, with the result that we also forgot the art of cooperating with one another to produce the results we wanted.[10]

According to Gandhiji *khadi* not only helped in providing employment to countless numbers badly in need of it, while its production and use reduced the imperial drain on national resources; but far more it helped us to free ourselves from indolence. Further, by stimulating the interaction of people with

one another in the variety of tasks required to produce *khadi*, it also brought us back together.

While the work of hand-spinning and hand-weaving gathered momentum during the 1920s and early 1930s, by 1934 Gandhiji began to focus his attention and great skills on the regeneration of Indian crafts and rural industry through the auspices of the newly created All India Village Industries Association (AIVIA).

Till about 1800, and in some areas till much later as well, nearly about one hundred crafts and industries used to be in a flourishing state in most parts of India. But from about 1800 onwards due to commercial, trade, fiscal and political policies adopted by British authority most of these had begun to have a precarious existence. By the end of the nineteenth century many of them had wholly disappeared and the rest were in a state of advanced decay.

Explaining how the idea of reviving such industries had occurred to him Gandhiji wrote in November 1934:

> A casual talk with a *khadi* worker (in Malabar) showed to me, how necessary it was to have a body that would make an honest attempt to return to the villagers what has been cruelly and thoughtlessly snatched away from them by the city dwellers. The hardest hit among the villagers are the Harijans. They have but a limited choice of the industries that are open to the villagers in general. Therefore, when their industries slip away from their hands, they become like the beasts of burden with whom their lot is cast.[11]

The inauguration of the All India Village Industries Association took place at the conference of the Gandhi Seva Sangh [12] at the end of November 1934. What Gandhiji said then shows how he looked at the problem of technology and is therefore worth retelling. He then said:

> But this reinstating the villager in what was once his natural position is no easy task. I had thought that I should be able to frame a constitution and set the association going within

a short time. But the more I dive into it, the more I find myself out of my depth. In a sense, the work is much more difficult than Khadi which does not in any way offer a complicated problem, you have simply to exclude all foreign and machine-made cloth, and you have established Khadi on a secure foundation. But here the field is so vast, there is such an infinite variety of industries to handle and organise, that it will tax all of our business talent, expert knowledge and scientific training. It cannot be achieved without hard toil, incessant endeavour and application of all our business and scientific abilities to this supreme purpose.

Thus I sent a questionnaire to several of our well known doctors and chemists asking them to enlighten me on the chemical analysis and different food values of polished and unpolished rice, jaggery and sugar etc. Many friends, I am thankful to say, have immediately responded but only to confess that there has been no research in some of the directions I had inquired about. Is it not a tragedy that no scientist should be able to give me the chemical analysis of such a simple article as gur? The reason is that we have not thought of the villager. Take the case of honey. I am told that in foreign countries such a careful analysis of honey is made that no sample which fails to satisfy a particular test is bottled for the market. In India, we have got vast resources for production of finest honey but we have not much expert knowledge in the matter. An esteemed doctor friend writes to say that in his hospital polished rice is taboo and that it is proved after experiments on rats and other animals that polished rice is harmful. But why have not all medical men published results of their investigation and joined in declaring the use of such rice as positively harmful?

I have just by one or two instances indicated my difficulty. What sort of organisation should I have? What kind of laboratory research shall we have to go in for? We shall need a number of scientists and chemists prepared to lay not only their expert knowledge about disposal, but to sit down in our laboratories and to devote hours of time free of charge, to experiments in the directions I have indicated. We shall

> have not only to publish the results from time to time, but we shall have to inspect and certify various products. Also we shall have to find out whether the villager who produces an article of foodstuff rests content with exporting it and with using a cheap substitute imported from outside. We shall have to see that the villagers become first of all self-contained and then cater for the needs of the city-dwellers.
>
> For this purpose we shall have to form district organisations, and where districts are too big to handle, we may have to divide the districts into sub-districts. Each of these, some 250, should have an agent who will carry out a survey and submit a report in terms of the instructions issued to him from head office. These agents shall have to be full-timers and whole-hoggers, with a live faith in the programme and prepared immediately to make the necessary adjustment in their daily life. This work will certainly need money, but more than money, this work will need men of strong faith and willing hands.[13]

This statement of the problem was soon followed by articles in *Harijan* on what Gandhiji considered some of the more important tasks requiring urgent attention. The first article, on 4.1.1935, explained the meaning of the step he had taken in setting up the All India Village Industries Association.[14] The second, on 25.1.1935, advised on how the programme could be started by those interested and dealt with the problem of hand-husking of paddy in some detail.[15] The third, on 1.2.1935, dealt with the grinding of wheat and the making of gur.[16] The fourth, on 8.2.1935, in Gandhiji's unique manner, dealt with the problem of domestic and public hygiene and sanitation,[17] and the fifth, on 24.2.1935, with the question of unpolished versus polished rice.[18]

In the article on sanitation Gandhiji observed:

> Some foreign observers have testified that, of all the nations of the earth, India comes, perhaps, to the top in the observance of personal cleanliness. But I fear that it is not possible to say the same of corporate, in other words, village cleanli-

ness. In yet other words, we have not made much advance beyond the family interests. We would sacrifice everything for the family as distinguished from the village, i. e., in a sense, the nation.[19]

Reverting to the corporate problem he observed:

Village sanitation is, perhaps, the most difficult task before the All-India Village Industries Association. No Government can change the habits of a people without their hearty cooperation. And if the latter is forthcoming, a Government will have little to do in the matter.

The intelligentia – medical men and students – can deal with the problem successfully if they would conscientiously, intelligently, zealously and regularly do the work in the villages. Attention to personal and corporate hygiene is the beginning of all education.

The things to attend to in the villages are cleaning tanks and wells and keeping them clean, getting rid of dung heaps. If the workers will begin the work themselves, working like paid Bhangis from day to day and always letting the villagers know that they are expected to join them so as ultimately to do the whole work themselves, they may be sure that they will find that the villagers will sooner or later cooperate. At least such is my experience of South Africa and Champaran, and even during the quick walking tour in Orissa last year.[20]

The setting up of AIVIA and the 1934 amendments to the constitution of the Congress – which made it a rule that henceforth only 25 percent of the membership of the All India Congress Committee would come from the urban areas and not less than 75 percent from the rural areas – became a cause of great concern to the British authorities in India. According to them, these were not only Gandhiji's ways of reaching to the peasantry but also a vehicle for sedition.

Writing to the secretary of state for India, Samuel Hoare, the Viceroy, Willingdon stated:

> Let me add that there is no doubt that the whole thing has been a great triumph for little Gandhi. He has gone out of the Congress, but he keeps control. He is now anxious to start, what he is pleased to call, his social uplift campaign in the districts and we are all quite clear that his one purpose is to instruct in the next year or two the agricultural population politically through this means, so that he may be able to come back at us with redoubled strength in the future. We are taking all steps now to make the provinces alive to the real danger of this new propaganda.[21]

As should be clear, technology for Gandhiji was intimately linked with society. Writing in 1934, when he was feverishly engaged in the setting up of the Village Industries Association, he wrote,

> If the villagers had enough to eat and clothe themselves with, there would be no cause for home-grinding or home-husking, assuming that the question of health was not of any importance or, if it was, there was no difference between home-ground flour and mill-ground or home-husked rice or mill-husked.

Earlier in 1925 he told a correspondent from the Punjab, that 'In the present state of India, anything like a universal introduction of electric power in our villages is an utterly impracticable proposition.' But he added, 'That time may come.'

In 1939, in the context of the modernising bent of the National Planning Committee of the Congress, Gandhiji is said to have acquiesced in the programme of modern industrialisation provided that the promotion and extension of village industry went hand in hand with modern industrial development, and that 'India was definitely not to depend on foreign loans for development,' that all money, private as well as public was mobilised for this purpose, and that 'a certain standard of living had to be defined as the objective' and both the modern industrial as well as the plan of village industry approximated to each other within a comparable measure of time.

In 1940 Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia asked Gandhiji about his views on the possible use of Western science and technology in India. Gandhiji responded through an article 'Ahimsa in Practice'. In it he stated,

> If I can convert the country to my point of view, the social order of the future will be based predominantly on the charkha and all it implies. It will include everything that promotes the well-being of the villagers. It will not exclude the industries mentioned by my correspondent so long as they do not smother the villages and village life. I do visualize electricity, ship building, iron works, machine-making, and the like existing side by side with village handicrafts. But the order of dependence will be reversed. Hitherto the industrialization has been so planned as to destroy the villages and village-crafts. In the state of the future it will subserve the villages and their crafts.[22]

Gandhiji had definite views about the desirable society and the norms within which it should function. Technology, according to him, should grow out of the requirements of needs of such a society and be fully woven into its social fabric quite in contrast to the way in which modern Western-inspired science and technology are said to be increasingly becoming wholly autonomous, or even said to be taking charge of the running of politics, and thus of societies themselves. For Gandhiji, the individual, the society and technology formed one whole in a similar manner as did religion, politics, and constructive work. Keeping them separate, or autonomous, was to him inconceivable. Such a situation seemed to him to inevitably lead to the state in which modern Western civilisation found itself and which he so outspokenly rejected in *Hind Swaraj*.

But as is very clear from the happenings of the past several decades, not much of this thinking was put into practice. In fact it was hardly even tried. It has to be remembered, however, that while Gandhiji was the supreme leader of India for some twenty-five years, many of the well-known and publicly influential of his soldiers had also to work and live under other pres-

sures, influences, ideological preferences and the like. For example, Lord Lothian claimed that Gandhiji had once told him that in certain eventualities 'the way of catastrophe may be the best way forward' for India.[23] However, many of Gandhiji's forward-looking and cosmopolitan minded followers could not possibly conceive of such a scenario. Further, as it was they who ultimately had to manage the new state, they naturally felt they also had to pay attention to other considerations. This was the point made by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru in his reply to Gandhiji's letter in October 1945. He wrote:

> The question of independence and protection from foreign aggression, both political and economic, has also to be considered in this context. I do not think it is possible for India to be really independent unless she is a technically advanced country. I am not thinking for the moment in terms of just armies but rather of scientific growth. In the present context of the world we cannot even advance culturally without a strong background of scientific research in every department. There is today in the world a tremendous acquisitive tendency both in individuals and groups and nations, which leads to conflicts and wars. Our entire society is based on this more or less. That basis must go and be transformed into one of cooperation, not of isolation, which is impossible. If this is admitted and is found feasible then attempts should be made to realise it not in terms of an economy which is cut off from the rest of the world, but rather one which cooperates. From the economic or political point of view an isolated India may well be a kind of vacuum which increases the acquisitive tendencies of others and thus creates conflicts.[24]

But even decades earlier, as early as in 1927-1928, Jawaharlal Nehru had written to Gandhiji :

> You have stated somewhere that India has nothing to learn from the West and, that she had reached a pinnacle of wisdom in the past. I certainly disagree with this viewpoint and I neither think the so-called Ramaraj was very good in the

> past, nor do I want it back. I think that western or rather industrial civilisation is bound to conquer India, may be with many changes and adaptation, but none the less in the main, based on industrialism.[25]

To this Gandhiji had replied:

> The differences between you and me appear to me to be so vast and radical that there seems to be no meeting ground between us ... I suggest a dignified way of unfurling your banner. Write to me a letter for publication showing your differences. I will print it in *Young India* and write a brief reply.[26]

But Jawaharlal Nehru did not want this opinion of his to be made public at all, and so Gandhiji told him in a telegram that he had 'no desire to publish anything from you.'[27]

The basic problem of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru – and a very large number who thought in similar categories – lay elsewhere. The fact is they had essentially a wholly different view of man and society. So while they remained faithful soldiers of Mahatma Gandhi, and through him of India, it was not possible for them to share Gandhiji's views on such fundamentals. To put it crudely Gandhiji was concerned with the living being and his spirit while Pandit Nehru and others like him were largely interested in the works of man. Along with the dominant view in the West, they shared the conclusion that notwithstanding all its holocausts (or the suffering or destruction of a large part of mankind in earlier centuries), the twentieth century and its products were unique phenomena in the long epic of man. In fact they seem to have shared a common Western assumption that everything that had happened in man's past was basically a prelude to the creation and glory of the twentieth century and its works, especially science and technology.

Naturally, therefore, Pandit Nehru could neither subscribe to the ideas of *Hind Swaraj* nor share Gandhiji's concept of village life. And as he was not too sure how a discussion on such a subject in the Congress would go, he was also rather chary of it.

What Pandit Nehru felt is best stated in his own words:

> Briefly put, my view is that the question before us is not one of truth versus untruth or nonviolence versus violence. One assumes as one must, that cooperation and peaceful methods must be aimed at and a society which encourages these must be our objective. The whole question is how to achieve this society and what its content should be. I do not understand why a village should necessarily embody truth and nonviolence. A village, normally speaking, is backward intellectually and culturally and no progress can be made from a backward environment. Narrow-minded people are much more likely to be untruthful and violent.
>
> Then again we have to put down certain objectives like a sufficiency of food, clothing, housing, education, sanitation etc., which should be for the country and for everyone. It is with these objectives in view that we must find out specifically how to attain them speedily. Again it seems to me inevitable that modern means of transport as well as many other modern developments must continue and be developed. There is no way out of it except to have them. If that is so, inevitably a measure of heavy industry exists. How far will that fit in with a purely village society? Personally I hope that heavy or light industries should all be decentralised as far as possible and this is feasible now because of the development of electric power. If two types of economy exist in the country either there should be conflict between the two or one will overwhelm the other.[28]

Regarding *Hind Swaraj*, Pandit Nehru stated:

> It is many years ago since I read *Hind Swaraj* and I have only a vague picture in my mind. But even when I read it twenty or more years ago it seemed to me completely unreal. In your writings and speeches since then I have found much that seemed to me an advance on that old position and an appreciation of modern trends. I was therefore surprised when you told us that the old picture still remains intact in your mind.
>
> As you know, the Congress has never considered that picture, much less adopted it. You yourself have never asked it

> to adopt it except for certain relatively minor aspects of it. How far it is desirable for the Congress to consider these fundamental questions, involving varying philosophies of life, it is for you to judge. I would imagine that a body like the Congress should not lose itself in arguments over such matters which can only produce great confusion in people's minds resulting in inability to act in the present. This may also result in creating barriers between the Congress and others in the country.
>
> Ultimately of course this and other questions will have to be decided by representatives of free India. I have a feeling that most of these questions are thought of and discussed in terms of long ago, ignoring the vast changes that have taken place all over the world during the last generation or more. It is thirty-eight years since *Hind Swaraj* was written. The world has completely changed since then, possibly in a wrong direction. In any event any consideration of these questions must keep present facts, forces and the human material we have today in view, otherwise it will be divorced from reality.[29]

The question of the nature and role of society and technology, particularly in India, seems to be best summed up by these two separate approaches (at times perhaps parallel, but mostly wholly hostile to each other) represented by Gandhiji on the one hand and by Pandit Nehru on the other.

In the years since 1950, and more so recently, it is the basic assumptions of the latter approach that have dominated the Indian scene. In the nature of things this was perhaps inevitable. Yet, while this approach may have delivered many outcomes, including the IITs which, irrespective of their allegedly heavy budgeting, seem to be on the whole amongst the more desirable of these products, it will be generally admitted that in the context of the general condition of our people our successes have been rather meagre. The causes of the low performance may be varied and perhaps go very deep. Yet it could be that while the bits and pieces of the technology that Gandhiji wrote

about may not have proved too relevant to the needs of India, his central approach to these problems, specially his deriving strength and creativity from his own indigenous sources, remains as relevant as ever.

Gandhiji is ordinarily considered to be somewhat of an autocrat while we (i.e. the privileged and elite in India) claim to stand for democracy. Yet for some reason, while his presence and contact gave the frightened and enfeebled people of India courage, initiative and a certain sense of dignity as well, our ways seem to achieve more or less the opposite: we make others look small, insignificant, and worthless. If this impression is true perhaps the most important task which we have is to find an answer to this riddle. It is not that the question has not been asked or people have not yet thought about it. But so far there is no satisfactory answer. It is said that most scientists who are awarded the Nobel Prize receive it for work done when they were around the age of thirty. Perhaps it is given to the scientists and technologists, especially to the relatively younger amongst them, to find an adequate answer to this urgent national question.

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25 *Collected Works*, Vol.35, Appendix X, pp.540-544, letter from J. Nehru to Gandhiji, 11.1.1928, esp. p.544.

26 *Ibid.* pp.469-470, Gandhiji to J. Nehru, 17.1.1928, esp. p.470.

27 *Ibid.* Addenda, p.546, 26.1.1928, Gandhiji's telegram to J. Nehru. This statement by Jawaharlal Nehru of his view that India was bound to be conquered by Western civilisation – though he seems to have publicly kept quiet about it – ultimately laid the groundwork for the Westernization of India after independence in 1947, initially haltingly and later with a great sweep. (During 1928-1946 such views must have taken root and spread amongst a very large number of westernized elite of whom Jawaharlal Nehru was a very important constituent.) Many persons around Gandhiji must have known of these views of Jawaharlal Nehru around then and later. At some stage at least, say before the formation of the provisional Indian government in 1946, these could have been made public by them, or by Gandhiji. It would have been right for Gandhiji to have shared these views of Jawaharlal Nehru – as the latter did not appear to have retracted them either privately or publicly in the intervening years – with the people of India before he blessed him at his joining the provisional government. Mahatma Gandhi alone knew the proper position: in fact, he owed it to the Indian people to have ensured in some manner that they fully knew what their political representatives thought and believed. If Gandhiji had shared this with his people events after 1946 might have taken a different course. Either Jawaharlal Nehru would have acknowledged his error publicly, or he would have at least at that stage withdrawn from India's political life. But as Gandhiji did not take these steps, it looks as if of all the Himalayan blunders which Gandhiji said he committed, this was a blunder of the utmost consequence. There appears no valid reason, either for others in the know, or for Gandhiji, for not having taken such a step.

28. J. Nehru, *Selected Works*, Vol.14, pp.554-557 letter dated 4 October 1945 from J. Nehru to Mahatma Gandhi.

29. *Ibid.* Incidentally, it may be relevant to note that about the same time that the above correspondence took place between Gandhiji and Pandit Nehru, the latter was having another dialogue on the shape of future India, especially the villages, with an American named Albert Mayer. An indication of the empathy between the two is indicated by Pandit Nehru's letter of 14 January 1946 to Mayer. *See the same volume*, pp.594.

CHAPTER FOUR

On the liberation of India

DESPITE CALLING HIMSELF 'an uncompromising enemy of the civilisation of Europe,' Gandhiji started his Indian period on a note of utmost friendliness towards the British administration and more so towards its British officers. This friendliness was by and large reciprocated by the British from the Viceroy down to the British subdivisional officer, though on occasion in a patronising or haughty manner. The patronising attitude was much more pronounced on the part of Willingdon, the Governor of Bombay (and later Governor of Madras, and from 1931 till 1936 the British Viceroy of India) and a few others. Yet, though it became rather lukewarm as time passed, the friendliness continued well into 1919. It must have been this lingering friendliness, and perhaps also a sort of impishness in him, which made Gandhiji ask the Governor of Bombay if he would sign the Swadeshi pledge in April 1919.[1] A few days later he made a

similar proposal to Viceroy Chelmsford: 'What a great thing it would be if the Viceroy would take the vow.'[2] Another instance of this continuing friendliness and its reciprocation by some of the British is provided by the attendance of the wife of the British Collector of Godhra in August 1919 at a women's meeting on Swadeshi addressed by Gandhiji. At the conclusion of the meeting she observed that 'she always was in favour of home industries.'[3] The same evening the Collector himself chaired another meeting on Swadeshi addressed by Gandhiji and is reported to have 'exhorted the audience to support home industries.'[4] It can, perhaps, also be said that the relatively speedy solution of the Champaran and the Kheda peasant movements became possible to a considerable extent because of this relationship of friendliness, especially at the viceregal level.[5]

However, the more Gandhiji came into contact with the workings of the British administration, and with the British officers who manned it, the more was his sense of disillusionment. Believing as he did that the British system was Satanic in its nature he must have realised at the very beginning that such friendly relations would in all probability be only of a temporary nature. But as he also believed in the basic goodness of man and in man's potential to transform himself, he did expect that friendliness and openness on his part would lead the British, at least in certain matters, to see the error of their ways. Even if this did not happen to any appreciable degree, in his view it did no harm and in any case helped him to understand them better.

As his friendliness and persuasion seemed to him to be of little avail Gandhiji was on the verge of giving the British a needed jolt in January 1918. On 20 January, he wrote to one of his close associates at Sabarmati, 'I am likely to have a battle royal over Mohamed Ali. If India carries out my plan, the Government of India will be properly humbled.' The stakes indeed were high because he felt that in the process of this battle royal, 'Hindus and Muslims, never united, will become so, mother cow will be safe and we shall hear the triumph of non-violence

proclaimed all over the world.'[6] As this battle royal did not take place it is difficult to fathom what Gandhiji actually had in mind then. But he did assume that such a battle would imply his going 'through an ordeal' himself, and that 'a power which has till now brooked opposition from no Indian is sure to fight as if for its very life when defied by a handful of Indians. Its fury then will be almost unbearable.' But he added, 'I am resolved to face it all.' A few months later, we find Gandhiji devoting himself body and soul to the recruitment of soldiers to help the British empire in fighting the 1914-18 war. But even the recruitment of soldiers was meant to serve a much larger purpose.

His experiences in India, especially in Champaran and Kheda, made him feel that the Indians by and large had been badly maimed, physically as well as morally and spiritually. Saints like Swaminarayan and Vallabhacharya seemed to him to have further deprived Indian men of their manliness.[7] He therefore came to the conclusion that before he could make this maimed Indian 'feel the virtue of not killing', he must 'restore to him the arm he has lost' i.e. restore to him his manliness.[8] As he wrote in July 1918, this discovery was forced on him repeatedly in Kheda:

> The people here, being comparatively freer, talked to me without reserve, and told me plainly that they took up my remedy (i.e. satyagraha) because they were not strong enough to take up the other, which they undoubtedly held to be far more manly than mine. I fear that the people whether in Champaran or in Kheda would not fearlessly walk to the gallows, or stand a shower of bullets and yet say, in one case, 'we will not pay the revenue' and in the other, 'we will not work for you.' They have it not in them. And I contend that they will not regain the fearless spirit until they have received the training to defend themselves. Ahimsa was preached to man when he was in full vigour of life and able to look at his adversaries straight in the face. It seems to me that full development of body-force is a *sine qua non* of full appreciation and assimilation of Ahimsa.[9]

And, therefore, as Gandhiji wrote a few days later, 'I have come to see, what I did not so clearly before, that there is non-violence in violence.' He did not consider that he had changed his ideals. Only 'the old idea has developed into something purer.'[10]

It is worth noting here that conventional wisdom as such was not something that Gandhiji much cherished. Writing in April 1919 he observed:

> I confess that I am dense. I am not joking. So many friends have told me that I am incapable of profiting by other people's experiences and that in every case I want to go through the fire myself and learn only after bitter experience. There is exaggeration in this charge, but there is also a substance of truth in it. This denseness in me is at once a weakness and strength. I could not have remained a Satyagrahi had I not cultivated the quality of stubborn resistance and such resistance can only come from experience and not inference. Pursuit of truth is any day a dangerous occupation.[11]

According to him, 'Even if we find in thousands of instances that water is made up of two parts of hydrogen and one part of oxygen, it cannot be said finally that this is its composition. The conclusion is only an inference. If however, I take two parts of hydrogen and one part of oxygen and combine them to produce water, that would be knowledge. It is knowledge verified in experience.' [12] He felt that in matters of moment, inference was not adequate and instead direct experience was of supreme worth. And hence Gandhiji's feeling in 1918 that those who were weak and frightened required training in violence before they could adopt non-violence as a way of life.

Another reason that seems to have led Gandhiji to assist in the recruitment of soldiers was that if a large number of young men (he several times mentioned the figure of five lakhs) voluntarily and consciously came forward, it would imply not only the conscious mobilisation of those who so volunteered but of another fifty lakhs of their relations, neighbours and friends

whom they would have consulted before making such a decision.[13] As he said in August 1918, 'I implicitly believed that if we were to devote our attention exclusively to recruiting, we should gain full responsible government in a year's time, if not sooner. And instead of allowing our utterly ignorant countrymen to enlist *nolens volens*, we should get an army of Home Rulers who would be willing soldiers in the knowledge that they will be soldiering for the country.'[14] But as he admitted a few days earlier, 'The task is most difficult. It is the toughest job I have yet handled in my life.'[15]

During the two months from June to August 1918, which Gandhiji completely devoted to the task of recruitment, the response from the people of Kheda etc., whom he approached was indeed poor. Many of his esteemed friends who otherwise agreed with him on this question of helping voluntary recruitment had already told him to expect such a result.[16] While the peasants of Kheda and other places had been relatively enthusiastic about the no rent campaign, in matters of recruitment he found them indifferent, if not actually cold or even hostile. Before Gandhiji could arrive at any conclusive results, either by way of a large number of young men offering themselves for recruitment, or being persuaded by the lack of response to abandon the task, the strain of the hectic life he had been leading and the meagre and curious food which he took then (peanut butter and lemons) made him seriously ill. During the next six months he remained critically ill. It was only after he was persuaded in January 1919 to start taking goat's milk that his health began to improve. In the meanwhile, the 1914-1918 war was over and there was no further need of any new soldiers for the British army.

By 1920, the country acknowledged Mahatma Gandhi as its supreme leader. The Indian National Congress followed suit and accepted his programme of noncooperation based on truth and non-violence. And by 1931, when he and the British Viceroy, Lord Irwin, signed the Gandhi-Irwin pact he had achieved

for Indian nationalism a state of equality with its British rulers. In fact as pointed out by Louis Fischer, imperceptibly, in 1928, 1929 and 1930 unknown even to themselves, and scarcely noticed by outsiders, Indians became free men. The body still wore shackles; but the spirit had escaped from prison. Gandhi had turned the key.[17]

II

How did this all come about? Obviously, though the Indian people seemed then to have submitted to British rule and measures, no affinity of ideals or interests ever bound them together. Naturally therefore when Gandhiji stood up in February 1916 at the Banaras University celebrations what he said there truly echoed the innermost feelings of his countrymen (*see pp. 98-99 for a detailed account*). As Gandhiji himself observed in March 1944, 'what he began to voice was what people had felt in their hearts but were not able to voice themselves.'[18] Through penetrating observation and some great intuition he was able to perceive things as they did.

But intuitive understanding, penetrating observation and a capacity for clear and resounding expression by themselves could never have created a movement of the dimensions that came into being under Gandhiji's leadership. True, the Indian National Congress, which became his platform from 1920, was happy to do what he wished. But till 1920 the Congress itself was mainly a debating body whose leaders met once a year to deliberate on what seemed to them as issues of the moment. Till then it had little organization, its total annual budget being around Rs. 30,000 of which about half was spent in England to propagate its views.[19]

Events, of course, especially the cold-blooded shooting of hundreds of innocent men, women, and children on British orders at Jallianwalla Bagh, Amritsar in April 1919 provided great impetus to anti-British national fervour. So did many other international events including the British decision to dismem-

ber the Islamic Caliphate. What is more, the people of India, even many men of wealth and power, recognised in Gandhiji a great charismatic personality – an *avatar* in the idiom of Indian tradition. A dramatic manifestation of this recognition was the annual session of the Congress at Nagpur in December 1920, attended by an unprecedented 14,582 delegates.[20] C. Vijayaraghavachariar, the Congress president, was then of the view that it was 'a Congress in which, instead of the president and the leaders driving the people, the people drove him and the latter.'[21] As Gandhiji described the session in *Young India*, 'It was clear to everyone on the platform that the people had taken the reins in their own hands. The platform would gladly have moved at a slower pace.'[22] After decades of slumber the people of India were on the move.

However, the momentum generated from below by the people could not last without appropriate mechanisms. It is in the conception and structuring of such mechanisms that Gandhiji's other talent – besides his intuition, penetrating observation and great charisma – lay. At the same time as the people were pushing the leaders forward, the Nagpur Congress gave the Congress a new constitution. It redefined the objective of the Congress as 'the attainment of Swarajya by the people of India by all legitimate and peaceful means.'[23] Its other thirty articles provided a structure for the Congress from the village up to the national level and made provision for the formation of a Congress committee in any locality which had enrolled a minimum of five members who subscribed to the Congress objective. Within weeks of the adoption of this new constitution, the Congress decided to enroll one crore members by 30 June 1921, and further to introduce into India's homes '20 lakhs of *charkhas* in good working order' by the same date.[24] The political arm of Gandhiji had thus fully come into being by the middle of 1921. Subsequent years mainly widened the base further like in 1934 when it was decided that three quarters of the members of the All India Congress Committee would come henceforth from the rural areas.[25]

The political arm, however, could not function merely on its own. It had to have a backbone, an invincible moral base to make the conquered people of India at least feel equal to their conquerors. Further, their submerged pride in their own distinctive heritage needed to be shored up, and their values, their modes of functioning, even their so-called crude tools and their frugal personal life had to have new meanings and values given to them. For instance, the *charkha* which was considered to have for long represented slavery and served as a vehicle for gross exploitation, from 1920 onwards began to symbolise freedom as well as nobility and the *khadi* it produced soon became the livery of India's freedom. One other such transformation was later with regard to the village hut. Gandhiji himself began to live in such a hut in Sevagram. (It was no temporary shelter; he lived in it for months at a time and even for a whole year at a stretch).[26] Like *khadi*, living in a hut not only became respectable but the huts where Gandhiji and his close associates lived came to be treated on par with the British Viceroy's house, or the palatial houses of the powerful and distinguished in India or anywhere else.

Notwithstanding the havoc and disruption which occurred in India from about 1750 onwards, this backbone, this moral base had stayed relatively intact. It is precisely this ingredient that had provided inspiration and impetus to the innumerable peasant movements[27] of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries against exorbitant taxation and other governmental injustices. The great campaign against the British-levied house tax [28] in Varanasi in 1810-11, or the campaign against the enhancement of the already heavy tax on salt in Surat in the 1840s,[29] or the volcanic anti-kine-killing upsurge of the 1880 and early 1890s,[30] could emerge only from such a moral base. Yet, at another level, through the Brahmo Samaj, through Dayanand Saraswati, through Vivekanand and countless other groups and individuals, this moral base – because it was treated as precious – had helped to keep Indian tradition alive, even when society shrank or threatened to come apart.

While this moral base and the feelings flowing from it survived all political subjection, and continued to manifest themselves in the sphere of personal salvation, or at times even served specific social ends, it was left to Gandhiji to harness and integrate them together with the other numerous Indian manifestations (the *vratas*, the asceticisms, the religious quests, the occasional *dharnas* and *tragas*, etc) for the regeneration and freedom of India. Before he returned to India, Gandhiji already had had recourse to the moral imperative with much effect to resist inequality and injustice in South Africa. He had also spelt out its working and the sort of Swaraj he desired for India in *Hind Swaraj*.

After he returned to India – while public addresses like the one at the Banaras Hindu University in February 1916, or the organising of movements like the Champaran and Kheda satyagrahas, or the Ahmedabad textile strike occupied much of his time and attention – what seem to have held his mind and attention a great deal more was the need to gather together the multiple manifestations of moral conduct and pursuits and to draft them in an integrated way to serve what to him was the central purpose, Hind Swaraj. It is his charisma and his moral stature which drew individuals, even families, to him as his message spread. Many such individuals, though sympathetic to Swaraj, came to him because of other urges. Yet whatever their individual pursuits and motives, if they appeared to him to have adequate determination and strength, he welcomed them as readily as he did those who were fully wedded to Swaraj. Once they had been accepted by him they became the carriers of his moral message, representatives of the ascetic and dedicated life, and the backbone of the constructive programmes and the organisations which from time to time were set up to promote such programmes. In due course a large number of them spread out to most parts of the country and more or less served functions similar to those of nerves in the physical body.

The moral ideas became the *vratas* of Gandhiji's Ashram, their ascetic manifestations, the rules of daily conduct, and the more tangible pursuits flowing from them, his constructive programme. Most of these already existed in Indian tradition and conduct. Those aspects, which seemed to him missing, he derived from his central moral concept so as to enhance the power and tenacity of what he had created. These in turn were adopted in hundreds of places and by thousands of such devotees for whom Gandhiji had become a beacon.

The *vratas*, the emphasis on manual labour, the prayers, the constructive programme and their respective evolution and development over nearly three decades – besides their own intrinsic worth – performed a more crucial task. Their role was no less significant than that of the vows and rules of the ancient Sanyasi orders amongst the Hindus, of the Bhikshu sanghas of Buddhism, or of the monastic orders of medieval European Christianity. As the purpose, or in any case a major part of it, which Gandhiji had in view was more immediate and possibly far larger, their role was even more significant. For a disorganised and demoralised people, for the disparate individuals who in their hundreds clustered around him, these provided discipline, an institutional framework that accommodated and harmonised various interests, provided purposeful activity, and more important, steeled the individuals for the greater hardships which appeared to be in store for them in the foreseeable future.

III

Much of what Gandhiji stood for obviously began to be abandoned from the period when independence from British rule seemed to be near at hand. A major role in this abandonment was quite understandably played by the British themselves, not so much by the British conservatives but largely by the British liberals and socialists who had all along considered British rule as a blessing for India and who were firmly convinced that the

preservation and continuation of British created structures and institutions was a moral duty that Britain owed itself. The actual execution of this enterprise and the designing of the final strategy was naturally left to experienced British specialists who had considerable training in such games. In a general sense, the withdrawal of British power from India was very similar in its strategy (even its breakneck speed) to the British conquests in South India and of Bengal in the 1750s. Like in the mid eighteenth century the Indians in 1946 and 1947 had to be kept on a hop, not knowing what was coming next, and thus in no position to assume any initiative. After about twenty-five years of agonised waiting – beginning from around February 1919 – during which despite the conflicting views in the Congress, Gandhiji had successfully snatched the initiative from the British and kept them guessing, the latter had once again begun to dictate the nature of the game.

But a far more important adversary to Gandhiji's socio-political ideas was a large section of the Indian Westernised elite. Even the more sanskritised, or seemingly indigenous elite could not stomach his society and its inter-relationships. If they were attracted to him, this was mainly because they saw him as a person who could help them in the achievement of *moksha*. For over twenty years, despite remaining unconvinced by his thought or reasoning, most of this elite was dazzled – in fact somewhat blinded – by his incomparable identification with his ordinary fellow citizens. They later felt in their diverse ways that he was an *avatar*. It is immaterial whether Gandhiji tolerated these attempts at adoration or not, or whether such veneration was exploited for purposes contrary to what he was trying to do. The main point was that it kept the Indian freedom movement under a single man's leadership and thus directed to an immediate common purpose (despite the various warring factions that had developed in the movement from the beginning, with the more elitist of these undoubtedly attempting to push India on the Western or Marxist road).

A major manifestation of the fascination with the Western road is amply reflected in the constitution of the National Planning Committee set up by the Congress in 1938, not only in its membership or the membership of its innumerable sub-committees but also in the proceedings of the main committee and the reports of its sub-committees. In a lesser way a similar phenomenon is reflected in the proceedings of the Gandhi Seva Sangh (1936-40). Its leading lights somehow seemed incapable of abandoning the rather rarified world they cherished – and also perhaps inhabited mentally – and of coming to grips with the more immediate and practical problems of a socio-political nature. Though it could not have been so intended, it appears that the seekers of *moksha* or *brahma-vidya* amongst Gandhiji's followers became a major obstacle to the detailed planning of a viable indigenous polity and thus eventually helped those who wished India's westernisation. Even those who shared Gandhiji's ideas about village industries, Nai Talim, etc. somehow were unable to shed their individual Western training, and the theories and universe such training or contact engendered. Thus, though they remained highly devoted, they were unable to be creative in the spheres of their choice. For many of them modernism became tolerable to the extent it ceased to be capitalistic and was managed instead by the modern state.

But what was primarily abandoned was not what is generally assumed by those who have been known as followers of Mahatma Gandhi or even by those who have been opposed or indifferent to his society and polity. True, those in power in the Congress agreed to the partitioning of the country against Gandhiji's wishes, as – according to them – not agreeing to it might have led to chaos or the postponement of independence. Further, those who mattered in the Congress, when it was on the threshold of state power, also disagreed with Gandhiji not only about the reorganisation of the Congress – when he advised its conversion into a Lok Sevak Sangh – but even earlier in 1946 when he suggested that all adult citizens of India may

automatically be treated as its primary members, etc. Gradually the inheritors of state power also became lukewarm to *khadi*, to village industries, to the cause of prohibition, to a national ban on the slaughter of cattle (even when all sections of opinion in many major states was in favour of such a ban), and to Nai Talim. Yet the real abandonment concerned the approach and the methodology for socio-political reorganisation. Though it claimed to be working for the poor and the weak, the actual manner in which the Indian state continued to function (obviously in continuation of its British precedents as well as under the influence of Western centralist and hierarchical thought and institutions) resulted in reducing the human person to a non-entity. It turned him in fact into a mere number in the grand statistical game of governance and development. This was a reversal, though gradual perhaps, of the dignity and autonomy which the ordinary Indian had begun to have and believed would result after freedom from the foreign yoke. But as time passed not only was he left with much reduced dignity and autonomy but his relationship with his natural and human environment began to be ruptured at a more rapid rate.

The society and polity of Gandhiji, and thus the historical polity of India – for it was that which Gandhiji basically represented – was put aside and its place was given to a polity European in origins in which most power, resources and decision-making had historically lain at the apex level. It is true that such a European polity in the late twentieth century has ordinarily not been uncaring towards its citizenry. Historical opportunity and the command of world resources over the previous centuries has made such caring possible for many of the societies of Europe as we know them today. But their core still retains the basic oppressive and domineering European features. Whatever has been created in Europe even in recent decades – sciences, technologies, philosophies, political theories, economic systems, etc. – still retains the stamp of such a core. Needless to say, Europe here means the totality of European civilization, whether

it is capitalistic, democratic socialist, or Marxist and whether it is dominant in the Americas, Australia, Africa or in Europe or parts of the Asian continent.

Over the past four to five centuries – and more so in our times – the West has, possibly quite deliberately, circulated the hypothesis (perhaps even made it look like a universal law) of an integral connection between the institutional frame of Western society and its aspirations and approaches and what it terms as scientific achievements and its capacity for technological innovation. That the theories of science as they have evolved in the West since about the end of the sixteenth century and the widespread Western innovations in technology, especially during the past one hundred years, are intimately linked with Western aspirations and the manner in which the West has generally tried to organise its society during the last two thousand years is self evident. But that scientific theories in general, especially those that are treated as scientific laws, or technological innovations require the adoption of Western norms or Western sociopolitical systems seems to be a deliberate Western myth, or worse still a product of the West's preoccupation with itself. As a simple instance, it was well understood from ancient times in India, and perhaps elsewhere as well, that life lives on life and the process of living involves a certain amount of violence exercised by one being on another. But it could only be a man of the West who derived from such and similar data the hypothesis of 'the survival of the fittest.'

For the West, in its effort at world leadership (political, material, moral – varying with its requirements or ideological fervour) to promote such a myth is quite understandable. As can easily be seen it is far easier to comprehend, master and develop Western scientific theory or suitably adopt what is primary in Western technology, than to tailor other societies according to Western norms or institutional structures. Societies like ours at present which succumb to such Western assumptions are naturally going to end up in social disruption in every

sphere and as a consequence lag far behind the West even in most spheres of scientific theory as well as technological innovation. While societies may learn many things from one another – and they have done so constantly for thousands of years – no society can serve as a model for another without destroying the other completely. It is India's misfortune (and perhaps a misfortune that is shared by many Asian and African areas) that because of a diffident and spiritually and culturally alienated elite it has fallen an easy prey to such a facile, false and baseless modern Western myth. But it is not only those who talk of catching up with the West, or bridging the 300 year old gap between the 'developed' West and 'backward' India, who are the sole victims. Those who ignore Western scientific theory or the West's technological innovations in the hope of keeping India uncontaminated from the Western poison are victims as well, perhaps to even a greater degree when they leave the field of Westernisation wholly open and uncontested to the protagonists of the West.

The only prominent Indian who seems to have understood the nature of this myth and who had an idea of how to challenge it seems to have been Mahatma Gandhi. (There undoubtedly have been Indians of equal stature and perhaps of far greater spiritual insight in the late nineteenth and the twentieth centuries but none of them seems to have understood the fundamental nature of the challenge in the way Gandhiji did). For him the primary task was that the society and polity of India had to be shaped by its own genius and bent, and wherever it had to be reorganised – had it not been badly mauled and even shattered during alien dominance? – that had to be done according to its own norms. Gandhiji did not wholly oppose any modifications – if demanded by contemporary developments – in India's traditional knowledge systems relating to the material world, or improving upon its own past experience, or suitably adapting and learning positive things from other civilisations. To the extent modern Western industrialisation was essential for India's

well-being, or its survival – if one understands him right – Gandhiji would have accepted its necessity. But he would also have worked to create a situation in which such a necessity was eventually transcended. Obviously the need for such acceptance of modern industry, etc., was to avoid doing a greater violence to the totality of Indian norms, and to maintain the balance between its society and polity.

Gandhiji certainly did not envisage a society which was obsessed with speed or progress and whose grand design was 'to put nature on the rack.' But neither did he advocate a society where nothing ever changed. What mattered to him most was that the society and polity had a moral and spiritual core, that its various constituents were in a state of acceptable balance (like the constituents of the stellar system or of nature itself), and that whatever changes took place were allowed in a manner by which the relationship of the constituents was not unduly disturbed. As may be seen from his various pronouncements (from what he said about the material requirements of life in the ashram and the village of Sevagram) he was not advocating *tapasya*, or penances, or the vow of poverty for the normal society in free India. In his conviction, society was to have all that it needed, but this was not to be at the expense of losing its self-initiative and self-restraint. Furthermore, it would retain its basic autonomy while feeling itself to be a part of the wider polity.

What has happened since Gandhiji's departure is more or less the reverse. Though we have been able to create a substantial political, administrative, scientific and technological elite, the main task of this elite today seems to be sheer self preservation. The people of India have been further reduced to a life which is lived on sufferance and the Indian state largely survives on the sufferance of the mighty of the world.

It may be true that the road we took at the time of independence would only have lead to such a state. It is possible that not much else could have happened in the situation in which India found itself in the 1940s with an alienated Westernised or

Marxist elite (whose Marxism or Westernisation was no more than parrot-like and is not much internalised even at the present), and with a governing structure which was allowed to continue more or less as it had been put together by the British from about 1750 onwards. But now that the hangover of enslavement, or engrossment with the battles for freedom or its heroes is a matter of history, it may be easier that we seek a different road, which, firstly, restores dignity and initiative to our society and polity at its primary levels; secondly, builds harmonious relationships not only between different levels but also between the differing societies and communities of our society; and, lastly, helps us create the required knowledge-base which may help us stand as equals to the people in other parts of the world.

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2. *Collected Works*, Vol.15, pp.274-5, letter to private Secretary to Viceroy, 5.5.1919.
3. *Collected Works*, Vol.16, pp.28-9, report of meeting, *Young India* 20.8.1919
4. *Collected Works*, Vol.16, pp.29-31, report of meeting, *Young India* 20.8.1919
5. The friendliness between Gandhiji and the Government at Delhi at that time and the latter's rather favourable attitude to Gandhiji's campaigns in Champaran and Kheda perhaps to some extent is comparable with the relative friendliness and favour with which the local and regional protests of today's environmentalist are occasionally treated by the Union Government in Delhi, while the state and local administrations are much more hostile to them. This does not mean that the Viceroy Chelmsford was more concerned with the well being of the people of Champaran or Kheda than the Governments of Bihar and Bombay. Only that he had to see matters in a larger perspective and in that Gandhiji's support in other matters appeared of more value to him than the planter or governmental interests in these places. The same reasoning is perhaps equally applicable to such matters today.

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12. *Collected Works*, Vol.14, pp.448-9, letter to Devdas Gandhi, 23.6.1918
13. *Collected Works*, Vol.14, pp.498-6, Appeal for Enlistment, Leaflet No 2, 'In preparing five lakhs of men who would be willing to fight to death, we shall have made fifty lakhs familiar with "war", "swaraj" etc. We want to train five lakhs of free men. They will be going with open eyes, of their own free will.'
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27. The first better-known peasant protest against British oppression was in the district of Rangpur (now in Bangladesh) in 1781-1982. From then on similar protests seem to have occurred constantly for at least the next 50-60 years in most parts of India. Fairly extensive accounts of them occur in the revenue and judicial records of the three presidencies; Bengal, Bombay, Madras. Similar protests also occurred in the latter part of the nineteenth century especially in Bengal and Bombay.

28. Dharampal, *Civil Disobedience and Indian Tradition: with some early nineteenth century documents*, 1971, for a detailed account of the protest against a tax on houses in Varanasi and towns of Bihar in 1810-11.

29. IOR: Board's Collections; Vols 2072-73: Riots at Surat in consequence of the enhanced price of salt, 1844.

30. The anti-kine-killing movement was considered to be of similar dimensions and consequences as the events of 1857-58 by the British Viceroy Lansdowne in 1893. According to the British Queen, Victoria, the movement seemed to be aimed against the British rather than the Muslims. The official record on the movement is vast. Besides the departmental and intelligence material there is considerable discussion on it in the papers of the Governors-General, especially those of Lansdowne and Elgin. Some of the material pertaining to this movement is included in Dharampal, *British Origin of Cow Slaughter in India*, SIDH, Mussoorie, 2002.

CHAPTER FIVE

What Gandhiji stood for

GANDHIJI ALWAYS SAID, 'My life is my message.' In itself this statement seems quite simple and straightforward. But the question we ought to ask is what did he call his 'life'? In a manner, what he ate, what he wore, the innumerable number of hours of the day and night he grappled with the problems of his people or of specific individuals were all an important part of his life. But there was something beyond the sum of all these actions that expressed the core of his 'life'. This was his courage, his fearlessness, his sense of friendliness towards all, and above all his devotion to Truth that was in reality the 'life' of Mahatma Gandhi.

If we look to his writings, in which of these can we obtain the key message of Mahatma Gandhi? Is it in the 'Anasakti Yoga' or in 'the Mangal Prabhat' or in his autobiography, *My Experi-*

ments with Truth? Or, is it scattered in the nearly 50,000 printed pages of the *Collected Works,* to be identified and prioritised solely in proportion to the number of words and pages that he devoted to each theme, ranging from *khadi*, Village Industries, Go-Seva, Nai-Talim, to issues like the removal of the practice of untouchability, Hindu-Muslim amity, the curse of alcoholic liquor or practices like Brahmacharya? Or, is the message really all contained in his main work *Hind Swaraj* which he wrote in 1909 on board a ship while travelling from Great Britain to South Africa and by which he stuck till the last? Or has the message become so badly enmeshed in the very voluminousness of his words that we have become immune to the essence of what he tried to convey to us?

Even those who lay much stress on Gandhiji's *Hind Swaraj* seem to have become victims of his words. At the most ordinary, we have become either infatuated with his denunciation of lawyers, doctors, and Western parliaments or hooked to his statement that his corporate aim, considering the situation prevailing in the 1920s, was – in contrast to his own personal quest – not the 'swaraj' of the book's title but parliamentary swaraj. Some of us feel that because he wrote appreciatively of many of his predecessors, he was merely walking in their footsteps. The deeper meaning of Gandhiji's 'life' appears to have been somehow lost.

In 1922 a British correspondent said to Gandhiji: '"Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's" means that it is our duty to pay the civil authorities what is their due.' He then asked Gandhiji, 'If it does not mean that, what does it mean?'

To this Mahatma Gandhi's answer was clear:

> Christ never answered a question in a simple and literal manner. He always gave in his replies more than was expected, something deeper – some general principle. It was so in this case. Here he does not mean at all whether you must or must not pay taxes. He means something far more than this. When he says 'Give back to Caesar the things which are Caesar's',

> he is stating a law. It means 'give back to Caesar what is his, i.e. I will have nothing to do with it.' In this incident Christ enunciated the great law – which he exemplified all his life – of refusing to cooperate with evil.'[1]

Whether Gandhiji understood Jesus Christ correctly or not, it does appear that the logic that he applied to the Biblical statement applied even more to all that he wrote or said during the course of his long life. To understand the core of his meaning, the essence has to be separated from the ephemeral. The basic elements of his message and the approach he had to life and society are perhaps best spelt out in *Hind Swaraj*. Not literally, in the denunciations of this or that or in his praise for the wisdom of Indian society and its ways, but in the totality of impressions and judgements that he tried to convey through the rather overcharged dialogue of the book.

A summary of Gandhiji's views on some of the important issues that exercised him during his eventful life would have to include *moksha*, the ashram, *brahmacharya*, Hindu-Muslim relations (in the context of cow-slaughter), parliamentary democracy and caste. I shall take these up in the same order.

Moksha

Gandhiji's quest, as he stated so often, was *moksha*. However, he wished to achieve his *moksha* through the service of his fellow beings. Committed as he was to the principle of Swadeshi – a preference for the near in contrast to the distant – this implied, in the first instance, the service of those amongst whom he lived, and consequently of those who inhabited the land of India. However, when he approached problems for resolution, he did not feel there were inevitable clashes of interest between India and the world at large. The service of the former thus implied, howsoever indirectly, the service of the latter.

This service took many forms. Enslaved as India was to Great Britain, and thereby to European civilisation and its institutions and values, the main expression of Gandhiji's service took

the form of designing ways and means that would lead to the liberation of India from Britain's yoke and from its ideological and institutional controls. The effort at liberation inevitably implied a clash between British power and a subjugated India. To make it possible for India to succeed in this struggle he advocated and applied the techniques of noncooperation, civil disobedience, and finally, individual and collective satyagraha. For creating the capacity to offer such noncooperation etc, it seemed imperative to Gandhiji that the noncooperators should not only toughen themselves in body and spirit but also examine, analyse and correct their own individual and social collectivities and rid themselves of the evils and aberrations that had crept into Indian society during the period of foreign dominance, perhaps over a longer period than that. To enable these struggles and internal corrections, he advocated recourse to the observance of ancient Indian *yamas* and *niyamas* and also laid great emphasis on what came to be known as the constructive programme.

As will be obvious to anyone familiar with his life and writings, Gandhiji thought and functioned at several levels. One of these was the level at which he strove for *moksha* or for the 'swaraj' of *Hind Swaraj* or when he assisted others who had spiritual seekings to advance towards these goals. But as he stated in his 1921 preface to *Hind Swaraj*, 'I am individually working for the self-rule pictured therein. But today my corporate activity is undoubtedly devoted to the attainment of parliamentary swaraj in accordance with the wishes of the people of India.'

Gandhiji appears to have been convinced that it was given to him to help India throw away her foreign yoke, to shake off the ideological and institutional stranglehold of the West and to restore Indian society to its old dharmic and moral base. His life was really given to bringing about such a transformation and – though *moksha* remained his own personal quest – he tried to achieve first what was practicable as a good state and society for his fellow citizens in general. He believed that what

he was doing would either take him on the road to *moksha* or – under the circumstances – his *moksha* would have to wait.

Obviously therefore *moksha* or *swaraj* either solely for himself or for similar aspirants was by no means Mahatma Gandhi's only concern. If one may say so clearly, his main concern was the liberation of India. That task required that he not only create appropriate organisational skills amongst the people of India, but equally, instill courage in them by his own example. According to him, the inculcation of these means alone would make them come into their own, enabling them to achieve not only dignity, initiative and well-being, but so link them with one another that if their wills or yearnings clashed, these would be on entirely rare occasions.

Ashrams

The design Gandhiji created was structured to restore to India not only freedom but also strength. The way life was to be organised in India in such a design was, to an extent, to serve as something worth emulating by the people and societies of the world at large.

To reach this point, however, even to take the first steps towards it, required the liberation of India from its foreign yoke. Simultaneously, it was incumbent on Indian society to correct, to the extent possible, the numerous evils and aberrations that had crept into its life. This requirement led Gandhiji to create new institutions and to experiment with a variety of institutional forms. The most well known of these institutions was the Gandhian ashram.

The Gandhian ashram is believed by many to be the prototype of the type of society envisaged by Gandhiji. To treat the ashram in this manner appears to me to be a grievous error. Gandhiji's ashram – as conceived by him – was primarily a training institute set up to provide a common discipline and purpose, a toughening of the body as well as the spirit. If it is not

considered blasphemous to say so, the ashram could be likened to a military training camp: while the armaments and the drill were wholly different, the purpose as well as the daily routines were very similar. The ashrams – and the ever increasing fallout from them – were meant to forge India into togetherness, and to create an army that not only proved as tough as the forces of the adversary but – under the generalship of Gandhiji – would aim to be two or three paces ahead of British strategy and forces at least till about 1942.

Yet the ashram was not wholly an army-like training camp or in any sense modelled on the British military cantonment. For those who were so inclined (for instance, Vinoba Bhave, K.G. Mashruwala, Surendraji and others of their ilk) it also could serve as a place for *brahma-vidya*; for many others, as a place of *tapasya*, of penance; for some, it even served as a place of escape from the strife of the world around them. The ashram was thus a concrete reflection of Gandhiji's ideas and his organisational skills.

Soon after its creation the ashram also became a center and promoter of what came to be known as 'constructive' activity. In turn, as the need arose, it gave birth to such organisations that would be concerned with either one or other item of the constructive programme. Examples of these were the Charkha Sangh, the Go-Seva Sangh, the Harijan Sevak Sangh, the Gramodyog Sangh, the Hindustani Prachar Sabha and the Talimi Sangh.

Yet even when the ashram led to the creation of such ambitious and extensive organisations or served as a vehicle for a common language of inter-regional communication or took up the great task of amity amongst the various religious communities – especially the Hindus and the Muslims – its main role during Gandhiji's life was the preparation of dedicated and well-directed soldiers for a free India. These 'soldiers' would not only join the battles for freedom but – according to Gandhiji's de-

sign – being spokesmen of the people, their concurrence would be required as well for the state to function.

Despite their crucial role in his scheme of things, it would be an error to treat the institution of the ashram – or for that matter, various other items of the constructive programme – as if they constituted Gandhiji's main social message.

The ashram as an institution that serves some important function of society is of course of perennial value; similarly, is the idea of constructive activity. Yet, for Gandhiji, the ashram as well as most of the items of the constructive programme – though important and in fact indispensable at the time – were only of transient value. They were required and produced for particular situations. Though each was important in itself and could stand on its own, joined together they were meant to serve the larger purpose of throwing away the foreign yoke and of helping to usher in the desirable order. As Gandhiji said in 1925 – and repeated in 1944 – work in agriculture would perhaps have been of far greater value and possibly symbolised Indian aspirations and requirements even more effectively than *khadi*. But in India's situation then – still under the British yoke – it was not possible to make agriculture into such a symbol.

Brahmacharya

Gandhiji believed that only a perfect man, a yogi – in the words of Gilbert Murray, 'a man who allowed so little purchase on his soul' – could move the world and do anything he wanted for its good. In fact, though Gandhiji was in many ways able to do wonders and make most people agree with what he said, often he found that those who had concurred with him under pressure tried to ignore him when they felt they could do without him. At such times Gandhiji feared that his great will-power, clarity and stamina were fragile indeed.

Gandhiji tested himself with regard to *brahmacharya* several times. An unpublished article, titled *Brahmacharya,* writ-

ten in June 1938, presents in a powerful way what was in Gandhiji's mind. Some extracts from it are quoted below:

> Hundreds, perhaps thousands of young men and young women are copying me or led by me in trying to observe *brahmacharya*, or are leading a life of self-restraint, complete or modified. For their guidance, and for the sake of truth, I must disclose my recent experiences...
>
> I have been fairly satisfied with (p. 173) the progress I thought I was making. But I received a rude shock on 7 April last when I had a bad dream. On the fourteenth I had experience such as I never had before. This was during my waking state ... I struggled on for full twelve hours. I was defeated. And there was involuntary discharge. I felt ashamed of myself. My *brahmacharya* was sullied ... I lost self-confidence ... One cause suggested itself to me. Could my close contacts and the freedom with which I associated with women have anything to do with it ? There was no easy answer...
>
> I have no dejection in me. I am certainly humbled. I have been thrown down from the height I was occupying ...(p 183) It was that *brahmacharya* which enabled me to go through the physical endurance that the strongest of my comrades in South Africa were able to go through, and to perform marches sometimes of 40 miles per day ... The physical part of *brahmacharya* is thus not to be despised ... Without the mind-control however, body-control is bound to be lost and the person may even become a first class hypocrite...
>
> I am the self-appointed general of the army of Satyagrahis. I have no armour but that of brahmacharya. Truth and Ahimsa cannot walk without *brahmacharya*. I have no wireless but my thoughts. I am not aware of having reached millions through human agency. I (p 188) believe from well-grounded experience that if one has full control over his thoughts, one has a powerhouse unequalled by any yet devised by all the physical sciences combined. This control is impossible without the conservation and conversion of the vital fluid in man into sublimated energy. Its emission, except for the purpose of procreation is a criminal waste of the highest power placed

> at his disposal by the almighty. That conservation and sublimation are an impossibility without the fullest control over one's thoughts and hence all the senses.
>
> Though I have travelled somewhat in that direction, it is clear that I have yet (p 189) to cover a long distance. This defect also accounts for my failure to give to the Congress an infallible prescription for curing it of inward corruption, violence and indiscipline. My belief in the efficacy of non-violence for achieving the common purpose is as bright as ever. Then why do I fail to carry full conviction at least to Congressmen? The reason is perhaps now plain. Non-violence cannot be imparted by mere appeal to the intellect. Its ultimate appeal must be from heart to heart. But for that appeal to succeed, my thought, and thence word, must have power. That power is lacking because my (p 190) thoughts have been found wandering like wild horses, as I did find on the fateful 14 of April. I must rein them in, if I am to succeed as the general of the Satyagraha army. Let those who have followed and approved of the step I have taken pray with me for the needed purification being vouchsafed to me by the unseen power that rules over us all.[2] u-Muslim relations (cow slaughter)

A major area in which British-sponsored images of Indian society were used to disrupt its functioning concerned the relations between the Muslims and the Hindus. Of all the Muslims in India, only 5% – comprising the Islamic ruling and military class – could be identified as original Islamic immigrant invaders (and their descendants) from Iran, Turkey, Afghanistan, Central Asia and Arabia. The rest – 95% – were converts to Islam from the general population long living in India. The converts dutifully followed what was required of them by their Islamic conquerors. But largely they retained very much their earlier status and customs. Even till today most of those converted to Islam still follow the customs of the *jatis* they came from, which have not changed very much: they do not, for example, marry with Muslims of other *jatis* (this may be true even in Pakistan) just as there had been little question of their marry-

ing into the alien aggressor Islamic communities. (Indians converted to Christianity also function more or less similarly.)

As a conquered people, the vast Hindu population had to be kept in subjugation and permanent dread of the conqueror. Whenever the Hindus seemed a threat to the alien authority, they would be made to pay special taxes for being allowed to remain unconverted. Their temples and other places of worship were demolished and destroyed by acts of the Islamic ruling authority. They were not allowed to hold public festivities when these clashed with Islamic prayers, etc, and to make them feel their subordination deeply, the cow and its progeny – which had always been sacred and dear to the people of India – were sacrificed and slaughtered at certain Islamic festivals.

But even these practices were not invariable. During many periods cow-killing was altogether banned, the special tax on non-Muslims was abolished now and then, and relative amity prevailed between the Muslims and Hindus during various festivals. At certain times and places even a number of specific Hindu temples were constructed by particular Muslim rulers. During the five centuries of Muslim dominance, there were ups and downs between the Hindus i.e. between the native citizens and the immigrant Muslims who had seized political power in various northern and western regions of India. Thus while this relationship, as it developed from about A.D.1200, was varied and complex, it began to be presented by Islam, and much more so by the British, as one-dimensional.

To begin with, in the initial years, Gandhiji himself was naturally unable to grasp the full nature and details of the collapse of Indian society: he too had been influenced by the prominence given to the hyperbolic writings of some Islamic writers about their conquest of India or by presentations by British writers of the gulf that separated the Hindus from the Muslims or the hundreds of assumed gulfs that were said to keep the various Indian *jatis* and communities separate and unconcerned about one another. As he felt that amity was most essential be-

tween Hindus and Muslims if they wished to put up a united front against the British, he began to lay much greater emphasis on correcting what – according to the British – were the problems leading to Hindu-Muslim animosity, problems that the British had a major role in creating in the first place.

In *Hind Swaraj* (*Collected Works* x.p.29) Gandhiji makes the reader ask the question: 'But what about the inborn enmity between Hindus and Mohammedans?' His answer was 'that phrase has been invented by our mutual enemy [i.e., the British] ...With the English advent [our] quarrels re-commenced.' Thus far Gandhiji had assessed the problem correctly.

However, he did not perhaps fully realise that it was the British who gave new vigour and passion to these quarrels. When the questioner in *Hind Swaraj* asks about his views on cow protection, Gandhiji replies, following the long implanted British version of events. He says:

> The cow is a most useful animal in hundreds of ways. Our Mohammedan brethren will admit this. But, just as I respect the cow, so do I respect my fellow men ... The only method I know of protecting the cow is that I should approach my Mohammedan brother and urge him for the sake of the country to join me in protecting her. If he would not listen to me I should let the cow go for the simple reason that the matter is beyond my ability.[3]

In the prevalent British-promoted dogma the Mohammedan was taken to be a natural and habitual cow-killer, which was not true at all whether he was a converted individual or an immigrant. It may be mentioned here that the Arabs, the Turks, the Iranians, the Afghans and the Central Asians were not ordinarily given to the eating of cows. The animals they slaughtered for food were usually sheep, goats and camels.

On the other hand, this cow-killing charge was fully applicable to the British and other Europeans and Americans in India. There had in fact been an anti-cow slaughter movement going on in India from around 1880 which even Queen Victoria

perceived as being aimed against the British and not at the Muslims.[4]

Gandhiji knew that this anti-kine killing movement was basically aimed at the daily large-scale British killing of Indian cows for feeding cow flesh to the 1,00,000 British soldiers and for the even larger British civilian population. Speaking in Bettiah in October 1917, he noted:

> It should be borne in mind, besides, that there are slaughter houses in all the big cities in India. Thousands of cows and bullocks are slaughtered in these. It is mostly from them that beef is supplied to the British. Hindu society keeps silent about this slaughter, thinking that it is helpless in the matter.[5]

At Muzaffarpur a few days later, he said:

> If we want cows to be protected, the thing to do is to save them from slaughter houses. Not less than 30,000 cows and calves are killed for the British everyday. While we have not succeeded in stopping this slaughter, we have no right to raise our hand against Muslims.[6]

Again in December 1920 he observed at Bettiah,

> If cow-slaughter were for the Muslim a religious duty, like saying namaz, I would have had to tell them that I must fight against them. It is not a religious duty for them. We have made it one by our attitude to them. Whereas Muslims slaughter cows only occasionally, for beef, the English cannot do without it for a single day. But we submit to them as slaves. We cannot protect the cow while remaining enamoured of the government.[7]

The Muslims of India were used as an excuse by the British to establish the legitimacy of their own killing of cows. No doubt some of the Muslims also did the actual killing, not necessarily for themselves but rather as employees of the British. As the British were the main killers, cow-slaughter in India could only end when the British quit India.

In 1947-48 the Indian Muslim leaders displayed that they did indeed have a better appreciation of the problem. Several of them suggested then that immediate abolition of cow-killing should be included in independent India's constitution. But most of the leaders were already so Westernized that they thought that a ban on cow-killing would lower India's image in the eyes of the world. Continuing to hold such a view, we have continued today to use the Muslims as an excuse for the continuation of cow-killing – as the British had done till 1947.

Parliamentary Democracy

In *Hind Swaraj* Gandhiji had made the observation that 'Parliaments are really emblems of slavery.'[8] Three years after his return to India, he adopted a slightly different line. Explaining his position in February 1918 to some one from England, he wrote,

> I still retain the position held by me in London. But that form of Government is an impossibility today. India must pass through the throes of Parliamentary Government and, seeing that it is so, I naturally support a movement which will secure the best type of Parliamentary Government and replace the present bastardism which is neither the one nor the other. What is more, I take part in the movement only to the extent that I can enforce and popularize principles which, I know, must permeate all systems if they are to be of any use.[9]

He had already presented similar views in a long address to the Gujarat Political Conference held at Godhra on November 3, 1917. There he said:

> These views of mine notwithstanding, I have joined the swaraj movement, for India is being governed at present under a modern system. The Government themselves believe that the 'Parliament' is the best form of that system. Without such a parliament, we should have neither the modern nor the ancient form. Mrs. Besant is only too true when she says that we shall soon be facing a hunger-strike, if we do not have

Home Rule. I do not want to go into statistics. The evidence of my eyes is enough for me.

Poverty in India is deepening day by day. No other result is possible. A country that exports its raw produce and imports it back as finished goods, a country which, though growing its own cotton, has to pay crores of rupees to outsiders for its cloth, cannot be otherwise than poor. A country, in which it is considered extravagance to spend on marriages, etc. can only be described as poor. It must be a terribly poor country that cannot afford to spend enough in carrying out improvements for stamping out epidemics like the plague. In a country whose officials spend most of their earnings outside, the people are bound to grow poorer day by day. What are we to say of the poverty of a country whose people, during cold weather, burn their precious manure for want of woolen clothing in order to warm themselves? Throughout my wanderings in India I have rarely seen a face exuding strength and joy. The middle classes are groaning under the weight of awful distress. The lowest orders have nothing but the earth below and the sky above. They do not know a bright day. It is pure fiction to say that India's riches are buried underground, or are to be found in her ornaments. What there is of such riches is of no consequence. The nation's expenditure has increased, not so its income ...

What then would our Parliament do if we had one? When we have it, we would have a right to commit blunders and to correct them. In the early stages we are bound to make blunders. But, we, being children of the soil, won't lose time in setting ourselves right. We shall, therefore, soon find out remedies against poverty. Then our existence won't be dependent on Lancashire goods. Then we shall not be found spending untold riches on building Imperial Delhi. It will, then, be in keeping with the cottages of India. There will be some proportion observed between that cottage and our Parliament House. *The nation today is in a helpless condition; it does not possess even the right to err. He who has no right to err can never go forward.* The history of the [British House of] Commons is a history of blunders. Man, says an Arabian proverb, is

> error personified. *The freedom to err and the power to correct errors is one definition of swaraj.* Having a parliament means such swaraj.
>
> We ought to have Parliament this very day. We are quite fit for it. We shall, therefore, get it on demand. It rests with us to define 'this very day'.[10]

According to Gandhiji, swaraj was not to be sought from the British.

> We have to demand swaraj from our own people. Our appeal must be to them. When the peasantry of India understands what swaraj is, the demand will become irresistible.[11]

That Gandhiji firmly held to this position can be seen from an exchange he had with C.R. Das while Gandhiji was in prison during 1922-1924. It appears that some negotiation was going on around 1923 between Lord Birkenhead, the British Secretary of State for India, on the one hand and the Swarajist Congress leaders like C.R. Das, Pandit Motilal Nehru, Maulana Shaukat Ali and others regarding the British granting some sort of dominion status to India. The negotiations appeared to have been moving smoothly, according to C.R. Das, when they were brought to the notice of Gandhiji. Referring to these negotiations, Gandhiji said on 25.5.1932,

> Das and Motilalji were considering the portfolios which they would have had in the new government. Mohammed Ali and Shaukat Ali thought they will be minister of education, and commander-in-chief respectively. Somehow our honour was saved, that we did not get swaraj, and nobody became anything.[12]

It may be inferred that, for Gandhiji, the appropriate time for any such arrangement with the British could only arrive when the ordinary people of India had regained courage and fearlessness and they had begun to stand up by their own strength. Such a time had not yet arrived in 1925, and it could be assumed that even in 1946-1947 Mahatma Gandhi did not feel

that the Indian people had achieved the necessary strength, to negotiate with the British as equals.

Caste

One of the major questions on which Gandhiji continued to modify his views was the issue of caste. The first major public reference to caste which he made was in June 1916 in Ahmedabad. He then stated, 'I have devoted much thought to the subject of the caste system and come to the conclusion that Hindu society cannot dispense with it, that it lives on because of the discipline of caste.'[13]

Again in October 1916, writing on the Hindu caste system, he referred to an observation of Sir William Hunter: 'Thanks to the continuing existence of the institution of caste, there has been no need for any law for the poor (pauper law) in India.' To this Gandhiji approvingly added,

> This seems to me a sound view. The caste system contains within it the seed of swaraj. The different castes are so many divisions of an army. The general does not know the soldiers individually but gets them to work through the respective captains. In like manner, we can carry out social reform with ease through the agency of the caste system and order through it our religious, practical and moral affairs as we choose. The caste system is a perfectly natural institution ... These being my views, I am opposed to the movements which are being carried on for the destruction of the system ... The caste defines the limits within which one may enjoy life, that is to say, we are not free to seek any happiness outside the caste. We do not associate with members of other communities for eating or enter into marriage relationships with them. With an arrangement of this kind, there is a good chance that loose conduct will be kept down ... Prohibition of marriage with anyone not belonging to one's community promotes self control, and self control is conducive to happiness in all circumstances. The larger the area over which the net is cast, the greater the risk.

> That is the reason why I see nothing wrong in the practice of choosing the husband or the wife from persons of equal birth ... In this way, the restrictions in regards to eating and marriage are, as a general rule, wholesome ... The caste system has other laws besides those relating to eating and marriage. It has, ready at hand, the means of providing primary education. Every community can make its own arrangements for [such] education. It has machinery for election to the Swaraj Sabha (Parliament). Every community with some standing may elect its own representatives. It has ready provision for arbitration and tribunals to solve disputes ... If it becomes necessary to raise an army for war, we have already as many battalions as we have communities.
>
> The caste system has struck such deep roots in India that I think it will be far more advisable to try to improve it, rather than uproot it ... In Hindu society communities have been formed, have disappeared and have gone through improvements according to the needs of the times and the process is taking place even today, visibly or invisibly. The Hindu caste system is not merely an inert, lifeless institution but a living one and has been functioning according to its own law. Unfortunately, today we find it full of evils like ostentation and hypocrisy, pleasure-seeking and quarrels. But this only proves that people lack character; we cannot conclude from it that the system itself is bad.[14]

It is often said that when Gandhiji used the term 'caste' he meant the four *varnas*. However, in the above observation Gandhiji is using the term 'caste' in the context of the scores and hundreds of castes (*jatis*) to be found in different parts of India.

In May 1920 Gandhiji wrote to C. F. Andrews on the fundamental differences they had 'on the marriage and the caste question'. In it Gandhiji stated:

> Just as it would be considered improper for a brother to marry his sister I would make it improper for a person to marry outside his or her group which may be called a caste. I would

> thereby make the other men or women free from the attention of that person..... Caste I consider a useful institution if properly regulated. Untouchability is a crime against God and humanity. I would purify the former, I would destroy the latter. If Manilal [his second son] fell in love with a pariah girl, I would not quarrel with his choice; but I would certainly consider that he had failed to imbibe my teaching. I would like him to be satisfied with his own caste division not because he would have any repugnance against the others but because I would like him to exercise self-restraint. Similarly for the institution of caste ... Rob the caste of its impurities, and you will find it to be a bulwark of Hinduism and an institution whose roots are embedded deep down in human nature.[15]

However, within just months of stating the above, Gandhiji appears to have moved away from his earlier views on caste. In December 1920 in an article he wrote for *Young India* on 'The Caste System', he observed:

> [My correspondents] argue that the retention of the caste system spells ruin for India and that it is caste which has reduced India to slavery. In my opinion it is not caste that has made us what we are. It is our greed and disregard of essential virtues which enslaved us. I believe that caste has saved Hinduism from disintegration.

But after paying the above tribute to caste, Gandhiji observed:

> But like every other institution it has suffered from excrescences. I consider the four divisions alone to be fundamental, natural, and essential. The innumerable sub-castes are sometimes a convenience, often a hindrance. The sooner there is fusion the better. The silent destruction and reconstruction of sub-castes have ever gone on and are bound to continue. Social pressure and public opinion can be trusted to deal with the problem. But I am certainly against any attempt at destroying the fundamental divisions [that is the four *varnas* of *brahmana*, *kshatriya*, *vaisya*, *sudra*].[16]

How this radical modification of his views on caste occurred between May 1920 – when he wrote to C.F. Andrews stating that he would consider that his son, Manilal, had failed to imbibe his teaching if he were to marry a girl of another caste – and his public statement in December 1920 – that the sooner there was a fusion of the castes and sub-castes into the four *varnas*, the better – we have no explanation. It appears that even while Gandhiji admired the system of caste he continued to have some mental reservations about it.

During the seven months between May and December 1920 he also seems to have come face to face with issues like the Brahman-non-Brahman controversy in Maharashtra and south India, and the tendency of the numerous smaller castes to be subservient to state pressure. This may have made him revise his earlier views radically. He might also have been under much pressure both from the Westernised as well as the orthodox Hindu, the latter standing for the primacy of *varnashrama dharma*, to modify his views. From then on, he was a firm advocate of *varnashrama* and gave up his admiration and support for the system of castes.

In 1932-1933 Gandhiji was in Yervada prison along with Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and Mahadev Desai. The three had long conversations on numerous matters. These were mostly written down by Mahadev Desai in the diary he kept since he had joined Gandhiji around 1918. These 1932-1933 diaries were published in three volumes (in Hindi) in 1948 itself. In volume three of these diaries, Narhari Parekh, the editor and publisher, has a longish introduction which at some length reproduces the discussion in the Yervada prison about *varna* and *jati*.

In it Sri Narhari Parekh says, 'Therefore Gandhiji is of the view that the *jatis* should get destroyed and be replaced by *varna-vyavastha*. Then a new life can arise in Hindu society. What he means by *varna-vyavastha*, he has made clear, in these three volumes, on the basis of his discussions with various persons. His first point is that *varna* should be according to occupation. *Brah-*

min, *kshatriya*, *vaisya*, and *sudra* these are considered the original four *varnas*. If because of multiplicity of occupations the number of *varnas* in society has to increase, he has no objection to that. The main basis of an occupation is that it is related to birth, that is, it becomes the duty of a son to engage in the occupation of the father.'[17]

During these discussions in prison Gandhiji is reported to have said,

> If *varnashramadharma* is not connected with birth, than I would give up *varnashramadharma* today itself. Then it has nothing of value left. I consider it proper that a carpenter's son becomes a carpenter, and not an iron-smith. If in this manner several hundred jatis get formed, so be it. So long as there is inter-dining and inter-marriage amongst them, it does not matter how many jatis there are. It is the restrictions imposed by dining rules and marriage rules of the jatis that has made the situation very difficult ... What I say is that it is not that a man of one varna does not have the right to engage in the occupation of another varna, it is not so; but doing this is improper. This dharma is for everyone. Its observance must not be had unthinkingly; such observance must be after due deliberation. The way the Hindus observe this, the same way the Muslims should. It is in this sense that I had said, 'that *varna-dharma* is the greatest gift of Hinduism to humanity'. By following such dharma the whole of society will be protected, the whole of society will become unconquerable.[18]

Earlier, Gandhiji had said, 'If there are no restrictions on dining and marriage, then one can call it *varna-vyavastha* if one wishes that, or *jati-vyavastha*, if one wishes the latter. They are very valuable arrangements.'

A few days later, Gandhiji said to Mahadev Desai,

> Yes, it is not as if crores [of people] were going to give up their varnas to get married outside. But those who leave their varna to marry elsewhere, to say that they are committing *adharma*, that should not be thought. *Adharma* is in giving

> up the occupation of the varna, not in giving up the varna to marry out of it ... To give up one's occupation is 'sankara', that is mixing up the varnas.[19]

In July 1946, Gandhiji was so sure of his vision of *varnashrama* that he declared: 'If I live up to 125 years, I do expect to convert the entire Hindu society to my view.'[20]

This was a statement of the utmost significance. Some twenty-one years earlier (in March 1925), after his talk with Narayana Guru, Gandhiji had observed:

> His Holiness [Sri Narayana Guru] told me yesterday that we might not see the end of this agony during our life time, in this generation, and that I should have to wait for another incarnation of mine before I had the pleasure of seeing the end of this agony. I respectfully differed from him. I hope to see the end in this very age during my life time, but I do not hope to do so without your assistance.[21]

It is possible that if Gandhiji had lived 125 years he would have seen to the complete elimination of untouchability in its varied forms. He might also have succeeded in ordering Hindu society differently.

Conclusion

What needs to be inferred from the several statements given above on different issues is that Gandhiji did not hold any rigid view on most matters of social or even technical organization. What mattered most to him was the current context which demanded the modification of views, and whether the modification appeared to be practical and for the good of society. His fundamental beliefs did not lie in matters of detail, connected with the given or changing situation, but remained the same as those spelt out in *Hind Swaraj* or as explained in his writings, as for instance on the relationship of modern technology with the basic rural structure of Indian society and its primary production and activities, the latter having primacy.

In popular discussions about Gandhiji it is usually said that whatever he said or did in his later days was according to him the best. This is based on a statement Gandhiji made in April 1933. On being charged that he said contradictory things on inter-dining and inter-caste marriage, he explained that while he did not think these essential for the promotion of the spirit of brotherhood, he did feel that these superimposed restrictions would undoubtedly stunt the growth of any society. Concluding his views, he said,

> But having said this I would like to say to this diligent reader of my writings and to others who are interested in them that I am not at all concerned with appearing to be inconsistent. In my search after Truth I have discarded many ideas and learnt many new things. Old as I am in age, I have no feeling that I have ceased to grow inwardly or that my growth will stop at the dissolution of the flesh. What I am concerned with is my readiness to obey the call of Truth, my God, from moment to moment, and therefore, when anybody finds any inconsistency between any two writings of mine, if he has still faith in my sanity, he would do well to choose the later of the two on the same subject. [22]

The point that Gandhiji makes is that the changes in his views are according to the will of God, from moment to moment. Obviously, all such changes need not always occur in linear succession as the modern West is wont to demand. Gandhiji himself could have basically reverted to an earlier position after having tried out various options. And those who come after him should not treat him so literally, but gaining from his insight and method, try to work out solutions for themselves.

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2 Sevagram Ashram Pratisthan: Note books of Sri Chimanlal Shah, No. 17, Chillar Uttar, pp 172-190; *Brahmacharya* (Segaon) Monday, 6.6.1938; possibly in Chimanlalbhai's own hand writing. *Collected Works*, Vol. 67, p.115 has a letter from Gandhiji to Jamnalal Bajaj 11.6.1938 which says, 'I have drafted a statement in English for newspapers, but I have not as yet published it ... However, I won't publish the statement in a hurry.' Footnote 2 on this page says, 'Gandhiji had written an article on his decision for *Harijan* but it was never published as some of the Ashram inmates did not approve of making Gandhiji's decision a public affair.' There is also some correspondence on it between Mahadev Desai and Sri Jamnalal Bajaj. One letter is of 12.6.1938. The above article ends with '(sd) M.K.Gandhi'. The note book perhaps is no longer to be found in the Ashram. I found, read, and copied it around 1984. (Dharampal)

3 *Collected Works*, Vol.10, *Hind Swaraj*, p 30.

4 IOL: Letter of Queen Victoria to Governor General Lansdowne, 8.12.1893.

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10 *Ibid.* Godhra, 3.11.1917, pp.48-66, Speech at Gujarat Political Conference, esp. pp.53-54.

11 *Ibid.* p.55.

12 Diaries of Mahadev Desai, 1948 (in Hindi) Vol.1, p.175, 25.5.1932. In the English version of these diaries, published in 1953, the above statement of Gandhiji has been deleted. According to Pattabhi

Sitaramayya: The History of the Indian National Congress, Vol. I, 1885-1935, pp 281-2, 'At the same time he [C.R.Das] was full of hope that he could effect a settlement with the British Government. Only a year previous to the time, when he was touring in South India he had declared on the sands of the Madras beach that Gandhi had "damaged and mismanaged", referring to Gandhi-Reading negotiations on the eve of the Ahmedabad Congress.'

13 *Collected Works*, Vol.13, pp.277-9, Speech on Caste System, Ahmedabad, 5.6.1916, esp. p.277.

14 *Collected Works*, Vol.13, pp.301-303, in Bharat Sevak (Marathi).

15 *Collected Works*, Vol.17, pp.534-535, Letter to C.F.Andrews.

16 *Collected Works*, Vol.19, pp.83-85, The Caste System, Y.I. December 1920.

17 Narhari Parekh: Diaries of Mahadev Desai 1932-1933 (in Hindi, published 1948-1951), Navajeevan Prakashan Mandir, Ahmedabad: volume 3; in the introduction, pp 5-6, Narhari Parekh sums up the views of Gandhiji on *varnas* and castes. The three volumes are : vol. I 10.3.1932- 4.9.1932, pp 404 (Rs 5), December 1948; vol II 5.9.1932-1.1.1933, pp 448 (Rs 5), April 1950; vol III 2.1.1933-20.8.1933, pp 524 (Rs 6), July 1951. These volumes were published in English in 1953 after some editing by the Navjivan Press.

18 *Ibid.* Vol.3, 18.2.1933, p.152; 9.2.1933, p.133.

19 *Ibid.* Vol.3, 12.3.1933, pp.185-186.

20 *Collected Works*, Vol. 85, pp.23-28, Talk with Members of the Harijan Sevak Sangh, Panchgani, 20.7.1946, esp. p.24.

21 *Collected Works*, Vol.26, pp.293-299, Speech in reply to 'Ezhavas' address, 13.3.1925, esp. p.298.

22 *Collected Works*, Vol.55, pp.60-61, Inconsistencies.

CHAPTER SIX

What Gandhiji tried to achieve

GANDHIJI AND KASTURBA returned from South Africa to India on 9 January 1915. Within a day or two of their return he told journalists in Bombay: 'I propose to reside in India and serve the motherland for the rest of my life.'[1] And this turned out exactly as he had resolved: between the day of his arrival and the day he fell to an assassin's bullet in January 1948, he left India again only once – for a period of four months – to attend the second Round Table Conference on India organised by the British in London in 1931. Out of the total period of some thirty-three years, he spent about six years in British jails, about seven years in his Ashram at Sabarmati and a total of about six years in his Ashram at Sevagram and at Wardha.[2] The rest of the period i.e. the balance fourteen years, he spent travelling around the country, whether it was – as in the first year – to acquaint

himself with his country and his people, or to prepare more or less single handedly for the Rowlatt Satyagraha or for the cause of *Khaddar* and Swadeshi, or of the Harijans or for Hindu-Muslim unity or for hundreds of other things which over the years demanded his presence or attention. The more prominent places that he visited during these thirty-three years exceeded 2000.[3]

Gandhiji's return to India was widely acclaimed by ordinary people as well as the elite. Many Indian newspapers carried long lead articles and news coverage of his visits to various places. For many of them, his coming was akin to that of a long-awaited *avatar*. The elite of Bombay, including its industrialists, financiers, members of the British Governor's council, judges and other public figures assembled in hundreds to accord Gandhiji and Kasturba an unprecedented welcome.[4] Within days of his return, people in many places insisted on themselves drawing the vehicle in which he was carried in procession. This first happened at Rajkot on 17 January and then again on 1 February; in Calcutta on 12 March; in Rangoon on 17 March; and in Madras on 17 April 1915.[5] At several other places he refused to be so treated and started walking instead.

Some of his public meetings during the very first month of return were chaired by the prime ministers (Diwans) of the respective states. Some of the Kathiawar rulers whom he visited paid him return visits: the ruler of Gondal embraced Gandhiji while he was being carried in procession there on 24 January while Gandhiji's wife, Kasturbai, was presented an address at a public meeting presided over by the Rani of Gondal.[6] A printed address in Gujarati at Jetpur (Kathiawar) on 21 January 1915 saluted him as 'Shriman Mahatma Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi'. According to another report on 27 January he was addressed as 'Jagat Vandaneeya Mahatma' at Gondal.[7] He was honoured as 'Karmaveer Mahatma Gandhi in Gondal'.[8] Again in March he was addressed as Mahatma at Gurukul Kangri[9] near Haridwar, both centres of indigenous learning and associated with the sacred. He was once again addressed as 'Mahatma' at

Gurukul Kangri on 10 April. Though he may not have been so addressed in print till 1917 or 1918 it seems that within a year of his return he was looked upon and addressed as 'Mahatma' generally.

The distinctiveness of Gandhiji when he returned to India was symbolised, firstly, by the theory and practice of Satyagraha which he had developed over the previous twenty years in South Africa, and secondly, by the views stated in *Hind Swaraj*. Perhaps far more potent elements that made innumerable people treat him with great affection and deference, and to insist, for instance, on personally drawing the vehicles in which he was carried in procession or spontaneously hailing him as 'Mahatma', were his simplicity in living as well as in manner and idiom, and the attributes of his saintliness. His method of resistance against injustice – a method with which Indian society had traditionally been familiar even though it had forgotten its public use,[10] – and its success against a modern, powerful and oppressive government like the Government of South Africa must also have made him appear as an illustrious hero.

In 1915 in India there were two principal sets of actors: the subjugated native population – more or less at a loss and not knowing how to regain their individual and social dignity – and the British ruling power which till then firmly believed that India was its to keep for centuries. No doubt there existed other groups, communities, social movements, etc. But all these led largely parallel existences. While at times their actions may have even tended to split the people and dishearten them further, they had little lasting impact on the British rulers.

But from about 1916 three new actors entered the scenario. The first was Gandhiji himself. Within a year or two of his entry, a deep conviction captured the Indian people that a man of destiny had arrived. The second was the transformation of the Indian National Congress – a transformation complete by 1920 – into a broadbased political arm of a regenerated nationalism daring even to boycott British-sponsored institutions, like the

law courts, educational institutions, the civil service, the army and even attempting to set up alternate structures in their place. The success of such daring was represented by the emergence of innumerable national schools and vidyapeeths and the expansion of grassroots membership in the Congress by around 50 lakhs in mid 1921.[11] The third element – which Gandhiji directly began to fashion – was a growing cadre of well-trained, disciplined and ascetically inclined men and women who in subsequent years fanned out over the country, ever ready to do what Gandhiji willed.

It is the interaction of these three new elements on the two basic constituents (the people of India on the one hand and the British rulers on the other) that holds the story of the Indian freedom struggle and what it aspired to achieve. As the direction of the struggle and the content of the aspiration were both largely defined by Gandhiji, he remained – for nearly three decades – the prime mover on the scene. Not that there were no critics of what he propounded from time to time. These were in plenty and even from amongst the ascetic cadre and indeed, time and again, for one reason or another he himself seemed to lose confidence.[12] During these moments he publicly retraced and changed track, talked of his Himalayan blunders, tested himself all over again till he had regained his confidence and could return to his role at the helm fresh as ever.

The overt and more tangible outcome of these three decades – the freeing of India from British rule – came in historically tragic circumstances. While independence was welcome in itself, its structure was felt to be disappointing in many ways as it belied the hopes and aspirations on which Gandhiji had based the struggle for freedom. On the other hand, the successes achieved were also quite surprising: not only the quitting of the British from India but the regeneration of a sense of dignity amongst the majority of India's people – especially in the 1920s and 1930s – and the widespread political consciousness even amongst those who still felt suppressed or ignored.

Thus a proper reappraisal of this period is essential in view of its significance to India's history. We need to understand not only its complexity but also the functioning of the mind of Gandhiji, the prime mover of the period. For nearly thirty years lakhs of people followed him – whether in direct political roles or in other multiple tasks he entrusted them. While these individuals may have influenced him in formulating and coming to decisions, they remained essentially his pawns – willing pawns no doubt – in the battle for freedom not only against a specific and mighty adversary but against an entire world-view as well.

Mahatma Gandhi's long and eventful life may be divided into four distinct periods.

The first comprised his two or three years in England (1889-1891) and the years in South Africa (1893-1914). These were the years during which he tried to come to an understanding of how the world worked. He also tried to grasp the nature of the British as well as the South African European state and society. He also put to experiment and test his methods to resist and overcome the treatment received by Indians and other non-whites living in these Western societies.

From 1915-1919 (the second period), we find him largely trying to comprehend India and the mind and *svabhava* of the country's people and to enunciate his views on scores of matters. In a way it was during these five years that he gradually spelt out his views on the basis and structure essential for the renewal of Indian society. He now equated *swadeshi* with loyalty to the neighbourhood,[13] deprecated the use of English – a foreign language – and stressed that each region of India use its own language as a medium of mutual communication.

The years 1920-1942 (the third phase) is the period during which he set out to consolidate and implement his vision. Undoubtedly, with the passing of time, there was a vast extension and multiplication of activities as well as institutions.

The period beginning from 1944 till his death was the final phase. As it unfolded, matters did not work out as Gandhiji would have fervently wished. What he had deplored in his preface to *Hind Swaraj* in 1910 came to pass: while the Englishmen retired, the British system gained the upper hand. Additionally the country was divided: there was a widening gulf between the Hindus and the Muslims, and great bloodshed.

Phase I: (1889 -1914)

Gandhiji achieved fame at a fairly early age. By 1909, a biography had already been published by Joseph Doke entitled *Gandhi: An Indian Patriot in South Africa.* By December 1909 he had written his most seminal text, *Hind Swaraj.*

As Gandhiji was defiant by nature when faced by injustice of any kind, he found himself gradually – and by the force of events – assuming the role of leading the Indians in South Africa to assert their rights, to put aside their fear and to become courageous. He recreated the art of passive resistance (an ancient Indian attribute) and called it '*satyagraha*'. Over twenty years of this struggle is vividly described in *Pahila Girmitiya* (a new book recently published in Hindi).[14]

Along with his South African Indian colleagues, Gandhiji not only waged major non-violent campaigns against South African injustice and oppression, but continually argued the justice of the Indian stand before the South African as well as the British authorities. An understanding of the principled stand that Gandhiji adopted in these negotiations is provided in a letter by Lord Ampthill, a former British Governor of the then Madras Presidency, to General Smuts, representing the South African European Government. In it, Lord Ampthill wrote:

> I went to see Mr. Gandhi yesterday afternoon and spoke to him in accordance with your suggestions, but without saying that they came from you. I found him as clear, convincing, and unyielding from his point of view as you are from

> yours, and after two hours of argument, in which we discussed the question from every standpoint, practical, political, legal and ethical, I came away in despair of any compromise.
>
> Mr. Gandhi is contending for a principle which he regards as essential and, so far as I can judge, he is no more likely to abandon a cause which he considers vital and just than any of us are likely to abandon our life-long principles of politics or religion. Indeed it seems to me that he is less likely to do so, for there are few of us who would sacrifice everything in order to secure a theoretical and unavailable right. It is impossible not to admire the man, for it is evident that he recognizes no court of appeal except that of his own conscience.[15]

What Gandhiji said and did between 1893-1914 – during his days in South Africa – created a great impression even in the world at large. He mobilised the people of Indian origin living in South Africa, gave them courage and a sense of self-respect to battle successfully with the South African European authorities for their honour and human dignity. His work made both the people and the political leaders of the enslaved and colonized countries wonder how this newly arisen group, small in numbers and without any arms, could stand up to the might of the Western world. Thus when Gandhiji finally returned to India on 9 January 1915, several Indian newspapers – *The Hindu*, *The Leader*, *The Tribune* etc – wrote long lead articles discussing his arrival and looked up to him for achieving great things for the country.

Phase II: (1915 – 1919)

On his return to India in January 1915 Gandhiji accepted Gopal Krishna Gokhale's advice 'and decided that he would go over the country for one year, and, after studying things for himself, he would decide his line of work.'[16] He spent 1915 travelling extensively (going as far as Shantiniketan, Calcutta, Rangoon, Haridwar, Rishikesh, Delhi, Madras, Bombay, Poona and, of

course, all over Gujarat) critically observing his countrymen and acquainting himself with his country.

In February 1915 he took a vow to go bare-foot for one year.[17] After three months, on 10 April 1915[18] at Haridwar, he took a vow 'while in India, not to eat more than five things during 24 hours; no meal after sunset; water not included among five; but cardamom and the like was included; nut and its oil treated as one article.'

The end of the year found him in Varanasi in time to join the inauguration festivities of the Banaras Hindu University in February 1916 being invited there by the university's founder, Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya. The inauguration and the main celebration lasted three days and was a glittering affair. It was attended by the powerful and the wealthy in India in addition to the students and teachers of the BHU. The participants included the British Viceroy who laid the foundation stone of the university building, a large number of Maharajas and other representatives of Indian princely states and many of the leaders of Indian political parties.

At the invitation of Pandit Malaviya, Gandhiji also addressed this great gathering. During his speech he deplored the use of English and stated that if our education had been conducted through its own languages, 'we should have today a free India, we should have our educated men, not as if they were foreigners in their own land but speaking to the heart of the nation.' Referring to the unsanitary conditions of our cities, lanes and even temples, he felt anguished enough to ask that 'if even our temples are not models of roominess and cleanliness, what can our self-government be?' The finery and jewellery displayed at the gathering, especially amongst the princes and the Maharajas, creating 'a most gorgeous show' brought him further pain. Pointing directly to it, he declared that there would be 'no salvation for India' till the wearers stripped themselves of it and held it in trust for their countrymen. According to Gandhiji, India's sal-

vation could only come through its peasants who had been ground down but comprised three-quarters of her population.

The last point he sought to make – at which stage he was asked to sit down and had to abandon his speech – was that if India were 'to conquer the conqueror', i.e. to regain its freedom, it could only be through fearlessness alone and not through secrecy or the methods of the anarchists. He declared himself 'horrified' by the presence of countless intelligence agents in the city of Banaras and felt that it indicated British distrust of Indians. He considered living in the midst of such security and distrust unbearable for anyone. It were better if the Viceroy 'should die than live a living death.' According to him 'we shall never be granted self-government but we shall have to take it.'[19] His principal exhortation was that Indians must allow India's reality to touch their hearts, and that their minds as well as their hands and feet should begin to move to redeem it.

His speech created such a stir that Mrs Annie Besant asked him to sit down. But there were simultaneously requests from the audience to continue and explain himself. His address never concluded however as the commotion was immense and many of the powerful and bejewelled began to leave the meeting seemingly as a protest to what they had heard him say.[20]

It did not take Gandhiji long to act according to what he had advocated at the Banaras Hindu University. He spent the next three years – from 1916 to 1918 – in publicly spelling out his ideas on the chief concerns of the period: Swadeshi,[21] Hindi as a language of communication between different parts of India,[22] the various Indian languages serving similarly in their respective regions and education being imparted in them,[23] the blot of untouchability,[24] Hindu Muslim amity,[25] and the imperativeness of a new system of education.[26] Gandhiji took several steps to achieve this agenda. From about 1918, he began advocating the primacy of the local language and then formally made the proposal a part of the constitution of the Indian National Congress by constituting Congress provinces on the ba-

sis of language. He lead movements against untouchability, pressing for its complete abolition. He succeeded in attracting the support of the peasantry for his movements to regain freedom and to correct several of the major problems that were disrupting and disintegrating Indian society. It is on the basis of his views that the first Backward Classes Commission was constituted soon after independence, followed several years later by many other similar Commissions. All these eventually resulted in reservations in specialised education and public appointments for those who had been excessively deprived and removed from public life altogether during British rule.

All these ideas and programmes no doubt had previously been advocated from various platforms. Even the value of conscious self-suffering, noncooperation, and non-violent resistance in national regeneration had been discussed and variously admitted before 1915 especially by Bal Gangadhar Tilak.[27] Gandhiji however extended these concepts, giving them newer and wider meanings. Along with these, he continued to attend to various other issues. He corresponded with the railway authorities about the hardships of railway passengers etc,[28] interested himself in the civic problems in Gujarat and – of great importance – guided the organisation and structuring of the Sabarmati Ashram.

The peasant campaign against the indigo planters in Champaran (1917-1918), the no-tax Satyagraha in the district of Kheda (1918), the Ahmedabad Textile strike (early 1918) and, perhaps, even his efforts at army recruitment for the British empire gave him an opportunity to apply his ideas of conscious self-suffering, noncooperation, etc., in resolving these issues. Equally they provided him with opportunities to experiment with and test his theories and learn how far he could go or expect ordinary people to voluntarily suffer and non-cooperate in the then given Indian situation.

An occasion for a major confrontation arose in February 1919 when Gandhiji was in the process of recovering from his six month old illness. In place of the war time restrictions on

civil liberties that were soon to lapse, the Government of India was proceeding with the enactment of new legislation titled the Criminal Law Amendment Bill and the Criminal Law Emergency Powers Bill – commonly known as the Rowlatt Bills. The Bills were meant to curtail further whatever civic liberties the Indian people then had.

The first protest meeting against the Bills was held in Bombay, under the Chairmanship of Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya, on 2 February 1919. As Gandhiji could not attend, he sent a letter instead saying, 'It was their duty to educate public opinion to oppose the Bills with patience and firm determination.' He also added that 'If he were not ill, he would surely have done his share in the agitation against the Bills.'[29]

The Bills, however, seem to have made Gandhiji come alive again. On 8 February he wrote to Pandit Malviya – also a member of the Viceroy's Council – that 'I at any rate hope that all the Indian members will leave the Select Committee or, if necessary, even the Council, and launch a countrywide agitation.' He further wrote: 'You and other members have said that if the Rowlatt Bills are passed a massive agitation would be launched the like of which has not been seen in India,' and added, 'I am not yet fully decided but I feel that when the Government bring in an obnoxious law the people will be entitled to defy their other laws as well.'[30]

The following day (9 February), he wrote to V. S. Srinivasa Sastri – also a member of the Viceroy's Council – that the speeches of the Viceroy and other British officers 'have stirred me to the very depths; and though I have not left my bed still, I feel I can no longer watch the progress of the Bills lying in bed.' He continued: 'If the Bills were but a stray example of loss of righteousness and justice, I should not mind them but when they are clearly an evidence of a determined policy of repression, civil disobedience seems to be a duty imposed upon every lover of personal and public liberty,' and 'for myself if the Bills were to be proceeded with, I feel I can no longer render peace-

ful obedience to the laws of a power that is capable of such a piece of devilish legislation as these two Bills, and I would not hesitate to invite those who think with me to join me in the struggle.'[31]

The same day Gandhiji wrote to Pragji Desai (who had been a fellow satyagrahi with him in South Africa): 'The Rowlatt Bills have agitated me very much. It seems I shall have to fight the greatest battle of my life. I have been discussing things. I shall be able to come to a decision in two or three days.'[32] On 12 February he wrote to the Government of India enquiring about the decision on the Ali Brothers who had been under detention for too long. On 16 February he informed the counsel for the Ali Brothers that 'I am, however, trying to speed recovery and I still hope that by the time I receive the reply from Delhi I shall be ready for work.'[33] On 20 February he wrote to the private secretary to the Viceroy telling him that 'I am not still out of the wood regarding my health,' hinted about his feelings on the Rowlatt Bills and then devoted the rest of the long letter to the subject of the detention of the Ali Brothers, concluding, 'I shall anxiously await your reply.'[34]

On 23 February he wrote to his former private secretary in South Africa: 'Passive resistance is on the topics regarding certain legislation that the Government of India are passing through the Council. The war council meets tomorrow at the Ashram.'[35] Still retaining his humor, he wrote to his youngest son the same day, 'a meeting of satyagraha warriors is to take place in the Ashram on Monday. The final decision will be reached after considering what weapons each has and how much of ammunition. If you have read Shamal Bhatt's description of Ravan's war council, Mahadevbhai will not have to recount Monday's history.'[36]

The following day (24 February), he drafted the Satyagraha pledge and signed it along with his colleagues,[37] and the same day sent a 250-word telegram to the Viceroy informing him of the pledge, making an appeal to him and inviting an early re-

ply.[38] The moment of which Gandhiji had written a year earlier had arrived fairly quickly: 'If India carries out my plan, the Government of India will be properly humbled; Hindus and Muslims, never united, will become so ... and we shall hear the triumph of non-violence proclaimed all over the world.'[39]

During the next few days Gandhiji was engaged in various preparations for the impending Satyagraha. On 1 March, he arrived in Bombay, on 4 March in Delhi where he also met the Viceroy who 'advised against Satyagraha.'[40] He next visited Lucknow and Allahabad, returned to Bombay on 13 March and left on 16 March for Madras. From Madras he visited Tanjore, Trichinopally, Madurai (where he also visited the Meenakshi temple), Tuticorin, Nagapatnam, and Vijayawada. During this one month, large public meetings were held wherever he went but as he was too weak to stand or to speak, his written speeches were read out for him to the respective audiences. On 19 March he decided that the Satyagraha should begin on Sunday 6 April 1919 as a day of fast, prayer and hartal. Delhi, somehow, observed the day a week earlier, on 30 March. The people of Delhi had organised an impressive and complete hartal and Swami Shraddhanand addressed a huge public meeting from the footsteps of the Delhi Jama Masjid.

The preparations during the previous four to five weeks, the enthusiastic response which Gandhiji's call had received and the stir which had been created made the British central authority panic. In Delhi, the police and the military were called in and shot at assembled people, killing many. Retrospectively, given their outlook, the British had little option. If they had compromised or hesitated, they would have lost face. More or less predictably, they over reacted instead, the result leading to the massacre at Jallianwala Bagh and similar killings in many other places. Whether the protest was so intended or not, the Rowlatt Satyagraha became a trap into which the British fell with their eyes open.

Phase III: (1920-1942)

Having worked out a model of the 'desirable society' as well as being in love with experiments (whether on food or on problems of the soul or of society or of politics) Gandhiji greatly welcomed any opportunity of interacting with others either in cooperation or confrontation. This period thus saw the launching of several India-wide movements: the revival, promotion and widespread production of hand-spun and hand-woven cloth, campaigns for abolishing the practice of untouchability and for treating women as equals of men and entrusting them with public responsibilities. They also included campaigns for boycotting British created schools and colleges, British courts of law and other British institutions and in their place establishing alternate indigenously structured and directed educational and other institutions. Other movements emphasised regional Indian languages, seeking to make them the medium of regional learning and communication. Still other initiatives sought to bring about hygiene and cleanliness in public places in towns as well as villages and restore Indian industries and crafts.

The period from 1920 to 1942 – in a general sense – may be taken to constitute several replays of the period 1915-1919. True, the issues changed from period to period and so also their solutions and remedies, but essentially most of what happened in the later years is comparable to that which had gone before during 1915-1919. Undoubtedly with the passage of time there was a vast extension and multiplication of activities as well as institutions. But basically the model of these was the Satyagraha Sabha of March 1919,[41] the Ashram at Sabarmati established in March 1915[42] and of course the National Congress after 1919 to which Gandhiji had given an elaborate constitution in 1920.[43]

The years 1920 onwards was the period of Mahatma Gandhi's supremacy both within India and the world at large. He was now a king, a saint, an incomparable hero of the people (the *Karmaveera Mahatma*) all rolled into one.

Phase IV: (1944 -1948)

The period beginning from 1944 is the final phase. Believing as he did that any single individual – who had risen above his passions – could on his own move the world, Gandhiji concluded that as events did not move in the direction he had planned and intended, this must be due to his own imperfection.[44] This led him into a period of much greater and intensified testing of himself to find out where his imperfection lay. On 24 February 1947 he said to Thakkar Bapa, one of his close colleagues: 'Ever since my coming to Naokhali, I have been asking myself the question, "What is it that is choking the action of my *ahimsa*? Why does not the spell work? May it not be because I have temporised in the matter of *brahmacharya*?"'

This state of self-doubt and the mode of the tests – especially as they did not appear to mend matters in any appreciable degree – led to unhappiness and doubts about his godliness amongst many who had for decades been close to him in his various endeavours. They also eroded his standing and perhaps made him appear to some as a person who had lost his saintliness and his path of virtue.

There were other consequences: the loss of confidence in himself and the pain resulting from it and his overall feeling of being unhappy, cornered and seemingly helpless provided an opportunity to many who felt they had been kept on a tight leash for far too long. They had hitherto stayed by him due to lack of other options. They could now break free and return to their former ideological moorings.

The grief and anguish that Gandhiji faced during these years (1946-1948) must however be seen within the context of the time. While there was a certain sadness resulting from the fact that he had not been able to achieve all that he had set out to do, the anguish and grief were largely circumstantial. To an extent it was demanded of him by the situation as well as by the people to whom he expressed this grief and anguish almost daily.

Gandhiji perhaps also hoped that by doing so he may be better able to calm the passions and anxieties of those days and bring some courage and comfort to those who heeded his words. Because of the volume of words devoted to it however, and also because of the Indian horror of bloodshed and chaos, the grief and anguish he went through has been allowed to overshadow everything else.

Though it was very disturbing when it actually arrived, Gandhiji had visualised just such a situation, though only speculatively, as far back as 1931. In a long interview to a British correspondent he had then stated: 'Very possibly there will be some serious communal strife when we have got Swaraj, but only for a little while. If you help us to stop it in the way I suggest, then it may perhaps end itself in the exhaustion or destruction of the one community by the other. There may be jealousies and disputes between factions, interests and (if you insist on the point) even whole provinces.' And he then added: 'But it is not consistent with the self-respect of a country or a race that it should give *carte blanche* to the power of another nation or another race or individual members of it to say "These people cannot manage their own affairs so they gave us a free hand to do it for them".'[45] The fact that the terrible strife occurred in the presence of British power and that the Indians counted upon British intervention – giving it *carte blanche* and all that it implied – was the major cause of the anguish and despair that he felt, while reflecting on the nature of the people that had been with him now for nearly three decades.

What Gandhiji objectively felt about what was happening may be inferred from one of his published writings in May 1947. In it he observed: 'What is happening is this. With the end of slavery and the dawn of freedom, all the weaknesses of society are bound to come to the surface. I see no reason to be unnecessarily upset about it. If we keep our balance at such a time, every tangle will be solved.'[46] On 28 May 1947, referring to the senseless bloodshed, he told the Chinese Ambassador in India,

'But I feel it is just an indication that as we are throwing off the foreign yoke all the dirt and froth is coming to the surface. When the Ganges is in flood, the water is turbid. The dirt comes to the surface. When the flood subsides, you see the clear blue water which soothes the eye.'[47] On 6 June, Gandhiji observed in a letter:

> You are gravely mistaken in assuming that as soon as swaraj comes prosperity will flood the country. If, before assuming that, you had used your imagination a bit to see that after 150 years of slavery, we would need at least half that much time to cleanse our body-politic of the virus that has infiltrated every cell and pore of our being during our subjection, you would not have found it necessary to ask me. I am sure you will understand what I mean, namely, that far greater sacrifices will be needed after the attainment of self-government to establish good government and raise the people than were required for the attainment of freedom by means of Satyagraha.[48]

Three weeks before the formal transfer of power to India, he said to a foreign questioner: 'When such a mighty power is dislodged a country's condition becomes even worse. We shall see this if we examine the history of the world. Compared to that nothing has happened in India.' But he added, 'That does not mean that an inhuman conduct is justified. It is really shameful. I am pained because we have sullied the noble method by which without shedding a drop of blood we made a great power leave in friendship. I also say that our countrymen are very simple at heart and that the British have taken advantage of that. We are so stupid.'[49] In November 1947 he told a Chinese delegation, 'Peace in Asia depends on India and China. These two countries are large. And if they build their edifices on the foundation of Ahimsa they will become known among the great countries of the world.'[50] The following day, in a message to Malaya, he said, 'The attainment of freedom by India has a unique importance in the annals of world history. Let Asia benefit from it.'[51]

From the above and from numerous other statements and observations of the years 1946-1948 it is evident that Gandhiji was not suffering from despair. He was largely aggrieved by what he termed 'senseless killings'. His anguish was due to the breakdown of a certain discipline and sense of order that he believed he had been able to impart to the people of India. Alas, there was evident sadness also at the clear reversal of direction – imperceptible to begin with – on which his colleagues and followers had launched themselves. In another period and place perhaps he would have immediately and openly disapproved of such a reversal. However, the fact remained that the country was going through a critical period and the British still held the upper hand. Some of his prominent colleagues thought they had already suffered enough and were no longer in a position to continue to resist, especially since they were not certain what was in store for them next. Gandhiji therefore surrendered to seeming inevitability. He had always believed in moving by stages in any case. So even a mere transfer of political power was not to be lightly dismissed. One could still keep striving for the rest.

Conclusion

How then does one assess Gandhiji's impact over the three odd decades that he lived and worked in India? And how does one interpret such a full and complex life? It cannot be by enumerating each of the things he did – including the famous Himalayan blunders – even though such a course has its own value in familiarising the avid seeker who wishes to know how Gandhiji moved from step to step. It is the approach that he brought to each and everything that he did and the manner in which he proceeded in the execution of his ideas that hold crucial lessons and insights.

The first point that one has to accept is that Gandhiji was an incomparable patriot, but of the type that did not feel there was a conflict between his patriotism and universalism as he

understood it. According to him, only such a person who was true to himself could be true to his family, neighbour, friends and the world at large. In 1915 Lord Willingdon, the then Governor of Bombay Presidency told Gandhiji that he i.e. Willingdon 'since his coming to Bombay, had not come across a single Hindu or Muslim who had the courage to say "No" [to him].' After mentioning this, Gandhiji told his listeners:

> The charge is true even today. We have 'No' in the heart but we cannot say so. We look at the other man's face to know whether he wants 'Yes' or 'No' and say what we think he would like us to say. Here, in this building, I could not make a little girl of three or four do my bidding. I asked her to sit on my lap, but she said 'No'. I asked if she would wear 'Khadi', she said 'No'. We do not have the strength which even this little girl has.[52]

Secondly, he believed that the civilisation of India – removed of its later blemishes, disorganisation, etc. – was far superior to the civilisation of the modern West. If he had been probed further on this and also properly informed about other civilisations in history, it is quite probable he would have put them at about the same level as the ancient civilisation of India as he himself perceived it. He considered the civilisation of the West to be based on self-indulgence and that of India, on self-control. According to him, 'If we (i.e. the regenerated India) commit violence, it will be as a last resort and with a view to Lok Sangraha. The West will indulge in violence in self-will.'[53] Though he stated this position in 1918, it does not seem that Gandhiji – however much he deplored the senseless violence of 1946-47 – would have expressed a different view even at the end of 1947 or at any point of time in between.

Gandhiji's constant emphasis on truth and non-violence should not make one overlook or ignore his other attributes. He not only had a vision of the 'desirable society' but was also a great 'law-giver' and an incomparable general. Those whom he moved to great deeds certainly had no known military arma-

ments. They were soldiers nonetheless. To the extent they had adequate courage, discipline, and self-control they were successful in the task they undertook. Those who joined him in his Ashrams, whether in 1915 at Sabarmati or later in its innumerable prototypes in various parts of India, were trained through the practice of the Ashram vows which were founded on the ancient *yama-niyama-vratas* of India. This inevitably meant a life of austerity and hard work, and the imbibing of a spirit of brotherhood in common endeavours with others.

The task before Gandhiji was not only to generate courage and confidence but also toughness and tenacity (perhaps he succeeded better with the latter two qualities!) in those who came to him or listened to him at all. His own exemplary conduct, the esteem he commanded, the self-denial and discipline which even ordinary people adopted at his persuasion, and the benefits and experience gained by them in the various battles they joined under his command or approval helped toughen, train and discipline the larger populace. To the extent this self-denial, training and toughening were deficient, they failed in their aims. Whether equipped thus with the most perfect self-denial, training, etc. they would have always succeeded in what they set out to do is debatable. But as Gandhiji would have said, in such an eventuality they would have willingly perished to the last individual and that according to him would have been success enough.

A curious point needs to be noted here. Most people, indeed practically all of us in actual life, take up extreme positions to begin with and then move by stages on to more moderate positions. With Gandhiji it appeared to be the reverse. Having publicly announced his goal in *Hind Swaraj* and having conceded that the goal was more of an aspiration, he began moving in the most cautious manner. What he demanded at any given point – though it may have had very wide import – was in itself always most moderate and reasonable. Whether it was so intended we do not know, the probability is that his every move

and its apparent reasonableness appeared to erode the moral basis of his adversary.

The different issues which Gandhiji undertook to advocate and for which he strived seem to have served the same central purpose. For example, he explained that *Swaraj* was to him like the *vata-vriksha* whose branches struck root in the earth all around it. Therefore, feeding any particular branch was like feeding the whole tree, but it was even better feeding, to change the branch that was being fed from time to time.

This principle he sought to apply as well to the other issues he advocated and to serve his central purpose. If a battle were to be fought regarding an issue, whether with the alien government or with his own countrymen – on the eradication of untouchability or Hindu-Muslim amity – it was seldom over in one strike. In fact it appears that before Gandhiji finally decided on a battle he did much experimenting and testing of all that he could put into the battle. This strategy did not merely apply to an external adversary. Gandhiji seems to have applied it to his own self or to those near him as is evident from his fasts and his experiments in *brahmacharya*.

Gandhiji is often labelled a shrewd Bania – which he undoubtedly was – but he also made himself a hard-working and innovative Shudra and Antyajya. In his great public roles he was much more of a Kshatriya and a Brahmana but finally it is as a great general that he can perhaps be understood best. A deeper insight into his mind – which one may occasionally have from his discussions and letters – and a reappraisal of his moves and what he set out to do will disclose that whilst moving from a central idea he would pick up whatever happened to be within his vision and suitable to the purpose he had in view. He would then test it from time to time – the more fragile it seemed, the more the testing. Such testing applied to the perfection of his own *brahmacharya*, as it did to the people's readiness for non-violent conduct, to the role of *khadi* or to the individuals as-

signed to various roles. Like any great general he had to look after his weakest defences.

If we look at Gandhiji from the point of view of his being a general – like Sri Krishna of the Mahabharata – we will be able to account for practically all of his thinking and actions from 1915 to the end. Bringing about a transformation seldom before attempted by any individual required not only total dedication to the achievement of the task (or its varying constituents) but demanded even more a sort of communion with those for whom the end was really meant. It also depended on incomparable organisational and strategical skills. Much of this is well known of course. Yet the 'Mahatmaship' of Gandhiji in a way seems to have made us oblivious of his approach, of the way he went about solving problems, and the designs and strategies of his battles not only against foreign yoke but also against what he treated as evil or misguided in his own people. For instance, his battle designs had advances as well as retreats built in them. As a superb general he knew that there can be few advances without some retreats. It was not so much the physical violence from the adversary, unfortunate though it was, that often decided the retreat but the breakdown of order and discipline that was crucial to success. Further, such retreats seem to have often been planned as such while the advance was intended as nothing more than a probe into the adversary's defenses and a testing of his own strength.

Thus the retreats were not really Himalayan blunders as we have been led to believe but merely the consequences of an elaborate strategy. When these occurred in the battles outside – or even within – the ashram situation, the point that saddened him appeared to be not so much that the lapses occurred but that he had either overestimated himself or had not done the requisite homework. He had not prepared his strategy properly. The violence that he disliked the most – especially in his role as the supreme general of the freedom struggle – was of the sporadic category. What hurt him most was the breakdown of the

discipline of his forces. While he was against all armed conflict and stood for the resolution of problems by reason and debate, what he was not able to stand at all was cowardice. To him anarchy was preferable to a dishonest condition. In his view, 'When the basis is evil, a superstructure of good adds strength to the evil.'

In whichever role we try to visualize him, it is doubtful that it would by itself disclose the source of his basic quality or even define it in any satisfactory way. How and when and where he acquired this quality or skill – a skill that did not consist solely of mastering the art of passive resistance, etc. but of elements of far greater import – may possibly never be known. We can safely assume that what he was able to achieve (and this included the sense of fulfillment and the feeling of nobility that those who came in contact with him felt) as well as what he could not – an approximation of the state of *dharma-rajya* that he regarded as his worldly aim – were both intimately linked to this basic skill and what he did. Any effort that holds some promise of understanding this quality would be of the utmost value.

Gopal Krishna Gokhale, a great Indian leader of the early twentieth century, had proclaimed Gandhiji to be a unique individual as early as 1909 at the annual session of the Indian National Congress. Gokhale had said then: 'He is a man who may well be described as a man among men, a hero among heroes, a patriot among patriots, and we may say that in him, Indian humanity at present has really reached its high watermark.'[54]

In 1920 the Rev. J. H. Holmes, speaking from the pulpit of a famous church in New York, proclaimed Gandhiji as the new Christ. He remarked again the following year: 'When I think of Gandhi, I think of Jesus Christ.'[55]

Gilbert Murray, an Englishman who had closely observed and analysed Gandhiji described what he understood of him in the following words in 1918:

> The story forms an extraordinary illustration of a contest which was won, or practically won, by a policy of doing no wrong, committing no violence, but simply enduring all the punishment the other side could inflict until they became weary and ashamed of punishing. A battle of the unaided human soul against overwhelming material force, and it ends by the units of the material force usually deserting their own banners and coming round to the side of the soul!

Murray then added:

> Persons in power should be very careful how they deal with a man who cares nothing for sensual pleasure, nothing for riches, nothing for comfort or praise or promotion, but is simply determined to do what he believes to be right. He is a dangerous and uncomfortable enemy – because his body, which you can always conquer, gives so little purchase upon his soul.[56]

From the introduction that he wrote in January 1925 to his *Autobiography*, one can ascertain that Gandhiji was aspiring to something wholly different. In its fourth paragraph, he wrote,

> What I want to achieve – what I have been striving and pining to achieve these thirty years – is self-realization, to see God face to face, to attain *moksha*. I live and move and have my being in pursuit of this goal. All that I do by way of speaking and writing and all my ventures in the political field, are directed to this same end.[57]

This aspiration of Gandhiji towards *moksha* may seem to contradict or ignore what has been said in the foregoing pages of this essay. A careful reading of Gandhiji's writings, even of the introduction to the *Autobiography*, will indicate that there is really no such contradiction. For Gandhiji, seeking *moksha* and aspiring for *Hind Swaraj* were one and the same thing; in fact, his *Hind Swaraj* was his *moksha*. In the 'Farewell' to the *Autobiography* he wrote,

> To see the universal and all-pervading Spirit of Truth face to face one must be able to love the meanest of creation as one-

> self. And a man who aspires after that cannot afford to keep out of any field of life. That is why my devotion to Truth has drawn me into the field of politics; and I can say without the slightest hesitation, and yet in all humility, that those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means.[58]

For Gandhiji (3.12.1925), 'God is neither in heaven, nor down below, but in every one' which made him endeavour, 'to see God through service of humanity.'[59]

That this belief stayed constant with him comes through many other writings. Ten years later, on 29.8.36, he elaborated on this further and wrote,

> I am a part and parcel of the whole, and I cannot find Him apart from the rest of humanity. My countrymen are my nearest neighbour. They have become so helpless, so resourceless, so inert that I must concentrate on serving them. If I could persuade myself that I should find Him in a Himalayan cave, I would proceed there immediately. But I know that I cannot find Him apart from humanity.[60]

In 1939 he was even more firm on this point and wrote,

> I claim to know my millions. All the 24 hours of the day I am with them. They are my first care and last because I recognise no God except the God that is to be found in the hearts of the dumb millions. They do not recognize His presence; I do. And I worship the God that is Truth or Truth which is God through the service of these millions.[61]

It is possible that after Gandhiji had achieved his *dharmarajya*, or perhaps if he had been persuaded to seek God 'in a Himalayan cave', he would have gone there too as countless men since the beginning of time have done in their quest for *moksha*. But as it happened it is clear from these words of his that it was through what he did that he considered he came face to face with God. In this lies his distinctiveness, his present as well as his historical relevance.

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2. C.B.Dalal, *Gandhi 1915-1948: A Detailed Chronology.*
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Collected Works*, Vol.13, pp.5-6, Speech at Public Reception, Bombay, 12.1.1915.
5. C. B. Dalal, *Gandhi, 1915-1948: A Detailed Chronology*. According to J. B. Kripalani, *Gandhi: His Life and Thought*, p.60, those who had come to receive Gandhiji when he first went to Champaran in April 1917, without Gandhiji's knowledge had unhorsed the carriage and drawn it themselves. Kripalani adds there, 'In those days, honoured leaders' carriages were pulled by their admirers.' It would be useful to know, from contemporary newspaper accounts, etc., which other leaders before 1915 had their carriages so pulled by their admirers. It is true that Bal Gangadhar Tilak's carriage was so pulled in Lucknow and a few days later in Kanpur. But that was at the end of 1916. (T. V. Parvate, *B. G. Tilak*, 1958, pp. 350, 355; S.L. Karandikar, *Lokmanya B. G. Tilak*, 1957 pp.433-434; D.V. Tahmankar, *Lokmanya Tilak*, 1956, p.242).
6. C.B. Dalal, *Gandhi 1915-1948: A Detailed Chronology*, 10 April 1915.
7. D. Keer, *Mahatma Gandhi*, p.212.
8 *Collected Works*, Vol.13, pp.15-16, Speech at Reception by Gondal citizens, 27.1.1915; Mahatma I: Photograph of Address Presented to M.K.G. in Gujarati calling him 'Sriman Mahatma Mohandas Karmachand Gandhi', between pp 216-217 in the original edition of *Mahatma*; also Dhananjaya Keer, *Mahatma Gandhi*, pp 212.
9. Dhananjaya Keer, *Mahatma Gandhi*, p.218.
10. *Hind Swaraj*, chapter XVII. Here Gandhiji had stated, 'The fact is that, in India, the nation at large has generally used passive resistance in all departments of life. We cease to cooperate with our rulers when they displease us.' Numerous instances of such resistance can be found in the history of India, even in the late seventeenth to the early nineteenth centuries.
11. Sitaramayya, *History*, Vol.1, p.214
12. There were perhaps several occasions during Gandhiji's long public life when his confidence became low. The causes were various. A major loss of confidence seems to have occurred after the February 1943 twenty-

one day fast. Within weeks of the fast Gandhiji began to express the feeling that he and his companions were going to be kept in prison for seven years. His release a year later – due to his fast declining health – did not seem to improve matters: it was then said that he had felt perplexed and taken unawares at this release. However, Gandhiji began to assume initiative in several directions, including his talks with Mr. M.A. Jinnah, the reconstitution of the *khadi* and constructive programmes, etc. But the confidence which Gandhiji used to have earlier on perhaps did not get fully restored to him in the remaining years of his life. To an extent his writings of these last four or five years make him appear much more lonely. If this impression has any validity, its causes require deep study.

13 *Collected Works*, Vol.13, pp 219-225, Speech on Swadeshi, Madras 14.2.1916.

14 Giriraj Kishore, *Pahila Girmitia* (in Hindi, about 900 pages), Gyanpeeth Prakashan, 1999.

15 *Collected Works*, Vol.9, Appendix XX (I): p 583, Lord Ampthill to General Smuts on Gandhiji, 10.8.1909.

16. *Collected Works*, Vol.13, 0.8, 14.1.1915

17. Dhananjay Keer, *Mahatma Gandhi: Political Saint and Unarmed Prophet*, 1973, p.216.

18. C.B. Dalal, *Gandhi, 1915-1948: A Detailed Chronology*, April 10,1915.

19. *Collected Works*, Vol.13, Gandhiji's speech at BHU 6.2.1916, pp 210-16

20. *Collected Works*, Vol.13, pp.216-18; from *Pioneer*, 9.2.1916 and *Bombay Chronicle*, 10.2.1916 on the BHU incident.

21. *Collected Works*, Vol.13, pp.219-25, speech on Swadeshi, Madras, 14.2.1916.

22. *Collected Works*, Vol.13, p.324, interview at Lucknow: national Language, 29/31.12.1916 .

23. *Collected Works*, Vol.13, p.242, speech on vernaculars and education, Madras, 17.2.1916.

24. *Collected Works*, Vol.13, pp.225-35, speech on Ashram Vows at YMCA Madras, (untouchability, pp 232-3) 16-2-1916.

25. *Collected Works*, Vol.13, pp.197, speech at Mahomedan Association, Surat, 3.1.1916.

26. *Collected Works*, Vol.13, pp.297-3O0, The Present System of Education, October 1916.
27. Tilak advocated the need of a common national language and a common script at a speech at Benares at the Nagari Pracharni Sabha conference in December 1905. In it, referring to the question of the Roman script serving this purpose, he remarked that 'the suggestion appears to me to be utterly ridiculous.' While speaking on 'Tenets of the New Party' at Calcutta on 2.1.1907, Tilak referred to the 'power of self-denial and self abstinence in such a way as not to assist this foreign Government to rule' over Indians, and added, 'We shall not give them assistance to collect revenue and keep peace. We shall not assist them in fighting beyond the frontiers or outside India ... We shall not assist them in carrying on the administration of justice. We shall have our own courts, and when time comes we shall not pay taxes. Can you do that by your united efforts? If you can, you are free from tomorrow.' (*Bal Gangadhar Tilak: His Writings and Speeches*, Ganesh & Co, Madras, Feb 1919, p.31,65, etc.)
28. *Collected Works*, Vol.13, pp.64,114-5, 284, 476-8, 547-31 relate to railway matters. There are railway matters in many earlier and later volumes also.
29. *Collected Works*, Vol.15, p.83, letter to Shankarlal Banker, before 2.2.1919.
30. *Collected Works*, Vol.15, p.66, letter to Madan Mohan Malaviya, 8.2.1919.
31. *Collected Works*, Vol.15, pp.87-8, letter to VS Srinivasa Sastri, 9.2.1919.
32. *Collected Works*, Vol.15, p.88, letter to Pragji Desai, 9.2.1919.
33. *Collected Works*, Vol.15, p.90, letter to OS Ghate, 16.2.1919.
34. *Collected Works*, Vol.15, pp.94-5, letter to PS to Viceroy, 20.2.1919.
35. *Collected Works*, Vol.15, pp.96-8, letter to Sonja Schlesin, S.Africa, 23.2.1919.
36. *Collected Works*, Vol.15, pp.98-100, letter to Devadas Gandhi, 23.2.1919.
37. *Collected Works*. Vol.15, pp.101-2, The Satyagraha Pledge, 24.2.1919.
38. *Collected Works*, Vol.15, pp.102-3, telegram to PS to Viceroy, 24.2.1919.
39. *Collected Works*, Vol.14, pp.160-61, letter to Maganlal Gandhi, 20.1.1918.

40. C.B. Dalal, *Gandhi, 1915-1948: A Detailed Chronology*, 5.3.1919.
41. *Collected Works*, Vol.15, pp.132-3, Satyagraha Sabha Rules, YI, 12.3.1919.
42. *Collected Works*, Vol.13. pp.91-8, Constitution Sabarmati Ashram, May 1915.
43. *Collected Works*, Vol.19, pp.190-98, Congress Constitution adopted at Nagpur, December 1920.
44. *Collected Works*, Vol.87, p.14. Earlier, in the Preface to Vol. 86, the Chief Editor, Prof. Swaminathan, describes the situation in the following words:

    'The situation created by the communal fury that had gripped India, just as she was about to take her place among the free nations of the world, had so shaken Gandhiji that for the first time in his half century of leadership we find him no longer sure of himself. It raised for him issues of the greatest moment. The way he saw it was that if he lived by certain values then those values should prevail. If they did not prevail then there was something wrong in him. He must re-examine himself, grapple with himself. That was one of the reasons he chose to walk alone and unaided. "Where do I stand?" he asks. "Do I represent this *ahimsa* in my person? If I do, then deceit and hatred that poison the atmosphere should dissolve. It is only going into isolation ... and standing on my own feet that I shall find my bearings and also test my faith in God." (p.134).

    'Gandhiji had held that *brahmacharya*, purity of life, was the chief pre-requisite for a successful pursuit of truth and he argued that if there had been failure on his part his *brahmacharya* might have been at fault. Pursuing this line of reasoning he started, towards the end of December, his great "experiment in *brahmacharya*" which consisted in his sharing his bed with Manu Gandhi, a young relative. His aspiration, as he explained at a prayer meeting, was to make himself a "eunuch of God". It was an integral part of the *yagna* he was performing (p.420). Since he was engaged in "the supreme test of non-violence in his life, he wished to be judged before God and man by the sum total of his activities, both private and public ... non-violent life was an act of self-examination and self-purification..."(p. 423).

    'Gandhiji's co-workers, as was only to be expected, did not quite understand and they were quite upset and one after another began to give frank expression to their disapproval. Writing to Vinobha Bhave Gandhiji said: "...the co-workers' pain makes me lose confidence in myself. My

own mind, however, is becoming firmer than ever, for it has been my belief for a long time that that alone is true *brahmacharya* which requires no hedges. My experiments arose from this belief." (p.452). He wrote in a similar vein to others (pp.464-5, 465-6, 475-6) trying to explain what could hardly be explained in words.

'As Vinobha says: "Gandhiji was a great man; nevertheless, he had laid bare his mind in its fullness before the world. For his part, he had permitted no secrecy. Even so, I must confess, the last chapter of his life, which I have called the 'Swargarohan Parva', or the chapter of the 'Ascent to Heaven', remains a mystery to me. Indeed, in my eyes, it stands equal to the last phase of Lord Krishna's leela. To unravel its mystery, it may become necessary for Gandhiji himself to be born again."'

What consequences this situation had on the leaders of the Indian national movement and thus on the shape of Indian independence seems to require a deep probe.

45. *Collected Works*, Vol.45 pp.374-7, interview to the *Statesman*; also IOR: MSS Eur C 359: typescript of interview given to Patrick Lacey by Mahatma Gandhi and revised in his hand, Karachi, 1.4.1931.
46. *Collected Works*, Vol.88, p.2. Question Box, Harijan, 1-6-1947.
47. *Collected Works*, Vol.88, pp.26-7, interview to Dr Le Chi Luen, 28-5-1947.
48. *Collected Works*. Vol.88, pp.86-7, A Letter, 6-6-1947.
49. *Collected Works*. Vol.88, p.433, Talk with Kelly, 26.7.1947,
50. *Collected Works*, Vol.89, p.492, interview to Chinese delegation, 6.11.1947.
51. *Collected Works*, Vol.89, p.494, Message to Malaya, 7.11.1947.
52 *Collected Works*, Vol.19, pp. 46-51, Speech at Students meeting, Allahabad, 30.11.1920, esp. pp 46-47.
53. *Collected Works*, Vol.14, pp.504-5, letter to Maganlal Gandhi, 25.7.1918.
54 T.V. Parvate, *Gopal Krishna Gokhale*, Navajeevan, Ahemadabad, 1959, p 110.
55 In Haridas T. Muzumdar, *The Enduring Greatness of Gandhi: An American Estimate* being the sermons of Dr. John Haynes Holmes, Community Church of New York, 1982; Sermon – 'Who is the Greatest Man in the World Today,' 1921, p.24.

56 Gilbert Murray, 'The soul as it is, and how to deal with it,' in *The Hibbert Journal*, January 1918, pp.191-205, esp. p.201.

57. M. K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography or the Story of My Experiments with Truth*, Introduction dated 26.11.1925 p.xiv (Reprint 1958)

58. *Ibid*, Farewell, pp.370-71

59. R. K. Prabhu, *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*

60. *Collected Works*, Vol.63, p.240; A Discussion with Maurice Frydman from *Harijan* 19.8.1936

61. *Collected Works*, Vol.69, p.33-37; At the time of ending the Rajkot Fast, from *Harijan* 11.3.1939

CHAPTER SEVEN

Sevagram—new beginnings

SEGAON IS A VILLAGE in a dry, infertile area of northeast Maharashtra. There are few rivers, forests or hills around it, only barren land on which the villagers attempt to grow a few crops for themselves and their animals. Fifty years ago when Gandhiji settled near this village (Sevagram Ashram is just a little beyond the perimeter of Segaon) it was not in any sense prosperous. Most people would not have even succeeded in getting together two square meals a day. But there is no prosperity today either. Segaon can still be seen struggling against unhygienic conditions and impoverishment; the faces of the villagers reflect disappointment and hopelessness.

But there has been definite changes in the areas surrounding the village. Fifty years ago there were no roads here and Gandhiji walked from Wardha to Sevagram when he first came

here on 30 April 1936. The following day Dr. Ambedkar and Sri. Balchand Hirachand also came here on foot to meet Gandhiji. For several years, in fact, the ashramites travelled to and from Wardha only on foot. Today there is a narrow path from the Wardha East railway station which goes past Sevagram and beyond Segaon. One can see signs of change and development as soon as one steps onto this path. On either side of it, the land belongs to the Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporation. As a result, factories and chimneys have come up very quickly. There is a brand new shiny milk booth on the road near the station. Milk from nearby villages is collected here and despatched in tankers to distant towns to quench the thirst of city-dwellers. The presence of these booths allows one to understand why the tea-stall owner near the station prepares tea only with powdered milk.

A few kilometres ahead one encounters the buildings of a modern medical college. Although the studies in the institution are very modern, its students have not yet broken out of their rural identities. Jeans and tops are still not popular. The students are seen wearing clean and regular clothes. One often hears Marathi being spoken. The domination of English has still not reached the institution. It is only the groups of young nurses – migrants from Kerala – that remind one that one has a hospital here. One feels sorry to see these young women – who must have grown up in a land with plenty of water and greenery – slaving away in such a dry area. But it has been the destiny of young women like these to serve people in every corner of the world. Perhaps the modern health system cannot function without the cheap services of displaced people. For these nurses, Segaon could not be very much worse than the deserts of the Gulf. Another feature that strikes the visitor is the presence of numerous video parlours that operate inside the huts on either side of the roads. In them villagers and medical college students get an opportunity – even well past midnight – to have glimpses of urban life-styles.

A few hundred metres beyond the medical college is the Sevagram ashram of Mahatma Gandhi. Surrounded on one side by the cheap, hybrid culture of towns and on the other by the poverty and dirt of villages, Sevagram is still trying to find a healthy way out between the two extremes. The houses in the Ashram are not dissimilar from the huts in the village: they are made by local craftsmen with bamboo and mud tiles. But unlike Segaon village, there is no dirt or stagnation here. The huts are maintained well and the courtyards of the ashram are open and clean. There is adequate arrangement of water for bathing and drinking. Trees and shrubs have been planted all around. It seems as if the Ashram is trying to demonstrate how a village can be made liveable by provision of just a few additional facilities. There is no need to turn a village into a town in order to make it vibrant. (Neither will we ever have the required resources to turn every village into a town.) If every village is able to arrange for its water and the villagers have enough confidence and capacity to maintain their own houses and keep their village paths clean, the country would be comfortable indeed.

These days Sevagram has few residents. But there was a time when this place functioned as the unofficial capital of the country. This is when Gandhiji had made it his home. After 1936 he tried to spend a lot of his time here. Despite his busy schedule and prison sentences, he spent almost as many as seven years at the ashram. And naturally wherever Gandhiji stayed, that place became the capital of the country. Because it was from that zone that the power and self esteem of the Indian people would radiate.

Today there are just ten to fifteen old Gandhian thinkers and leaders staying in the Ashram, apart from a young secretary. The food is simple, healthy and sufficient. The routine of prayers continues unchanged every morning and evening. The prayers are held under the same peepul tree that Gandhiji used to address his prayer meetings. In this manner the memory of Gandhiji and his times remains intact. One admires the deter-

mination and courage of the young secretary and the old ashramites. They have devoted their entire lives to keep alive the memory of a person whom the country seems to have largely forgotten. It is not easy to keep mud huts and old memories intact. One has to keep dusting and repairing them quite frequently. It takes sheer courage on the part of the young secretary to keep the ashram going against all odds, inspite of lack of resources.

But how long can such courage and earnestness last? After all, we have to decide now in what form we intend to keep Gandhiji's memory alive. A government minister from Maharashtra once suggested that Sevagram could be converted into a tourist spot. Fortunately this idea appears to have been laid to rest. We may not be able to keep Gandhiji's memory alive, but at least we should not insult the very culture he stood for. All his life Gandhiji taught us to respect ourselves and our traditions. He taught us to make careful use of our resources, to stand on our feet on the basis of our traditions, techniques and thought. Will we trade his memory for some foreign exchange? It would be an unpardonable insult to the memory of Gandhiji to earn foreign exchange in his name in this way. If such a thing is done then all Gandhians must unite and do '*satyagraha*' to protest such proposals. On the other hand, if the government and the people of India could – in the name of Gandhiji – make even a small attempt to keep themselves away from foreign money and foreign thinking, that alone would be sufficient tribute to him.

There have also been rumours that Sevagram might be turned into a university. That is a good idea. In recent years it has been the trend to set up chairs, departments, etc. on Gandhian thought in certain universities. A few institutes of study and research in the name of Mahatma Gandhi have also been set up. Even assuming that these have functioned well under the rules that govern them and the environment in which they are located, it is doubtful whether they could have escaped the

intellectual sterility that surrounds them. Their contribution could only be meagre even under the best of circumstances. What is actually required is to analyse the thought, approach and words of Gandhiji and incorporate them within the curriculum of most academic disciplines in the humanities as well as in the sciences. Sadly this has so far not been attempted.

Perhaps it was not easy to initiate this process till the *Collected Works* were available. Now that they are, it becomes the responsibility of the Indian academic fraternity to give Mahatma Gandhi in its teaching and research programmes the same attention that it does to western philosophers, theorists, philosophers of science, political scientists, psychologists, economists, etc. It is possible that the ideas of Mahatma Gandhi may not be able to withstand the strain of modern academic scrutiny. But Gandhiji stood for truth all his life. If by scrutiny of his life one were able to establish that the truth value of what he said and did had only an ephemeral quality and even less permanence, one would serve not only truth but Gandhiji as well. A beginning in this direction would automatically lead us to the exploration of the roots of Gandhiji's approach and ideas. It would then only be a matter of time before Indian academics acquired an indigenous base strong and secure enough to enter into mutually beneficial scholarly exchanges with other civilisations.

However just one university is not enough. If we are serious in wanting to acknowledge and preserve Gandhiji's memory, there must be not one but several universities in his name. Gandhiji gave us the vision to enable us to live our lives distinctly different from the Western way of life. Gandhiji believed that it is only within the framework of Indian tradition and culture that it was possible to create the socioeconomic systems necessary to realise the vision of a clean and equitable society. He spent his entire life attempting to design systems that would be appropriate to the vision of Indian *sanatana* thought in contemporary times. It is true that he was not able to fill in all the detailed outlines of these systems. But his vision was so power-

ful he was able to infuse new spirit into the public life of India. It is the power of that dream that filled the people with so much confidence that they were successfully able to end British colonial rule.

Gandhiji completed his work by ensuring that India became independent. It is our task now to raise the structures of appropriate systems in order to realise his dream. Gandhian universities would be able to give a concrete shape to Gandhiji's dream by concentrating on the culture and traditions of this country and also by focussing on acquiring deeper knowledge of our neighbours in the east and the west, including the countries of Africa. Gandhiji knew that a lot of thinkers and doers would be needed to establish the infrastructure for the promotion of his ideas. Gandhiji had even advised the Gandhi Seva Sangh to work as a postgraduate study centre. Now we can make his wishes come true by establishing several such universities.

However, it will not be enough only to establish universities. The fundamentals of Gandhian thought cannot be confined to libraries or laboratories but must extend to everyday behaviour as well. If we mean to realise Gandhiji's dreams, we must make provision that at least one state should be run along Gandhian lines. After Gandhiji's death – in our attempts to mould the country along western lines – we have already ensured the alienation of the Indian people from the process of nation building. The self confidence, creativity and courage instilled in us by Gandhiji have been squandered to a great extent. Perhaps we may succeed in recovering a lot of that creativity if we tried to run one state along Gandhian lines. This state could then serve as an experimental ground for the Gandhian universities. Sevagram could become the capital of this state or its Administrative Staff College. We have nothing to lose from such a trial. The majority of the people of such a state would not suffer in any way. If the relatively well off people do incur some losses, they could always be compensated. On the other hand,

if we try this and we are successful, we can hope to accomplish something new.*

The minute one talks of setting up systems along Gandhian lines, people immediately fear that we will be cutting ourselves off from the world and will shrink into our own little universe. Such fears are baseless. Gandhiji was not only concerned about the people of India, but about the people of the entire planet. He disapproved of Western culture because people from that culture had been violent and unjust to the people of India. But after his visits to Western countries, Gandhiji saw that Western

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*Within a year or so of Mahatma Gandhi's death, a variety of ideas seem to have occurred to some of the leaders of India's freedom struggle. The Congress as a party, and others who had become members of the Indian Constituent Assembly, were undoubtedly engaged in the drafting of the constitution for India on the pattern decided upon at the time of what the British called the transfer of power to India on 15 August 1947. Yet there were other ideas in circulation as well, though none seemed to have become reality.

Sometime in 1948 Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel wrote a long letter to Shri Jayaprakash Narayan telling him that as their pre-independence differences had become a thing of the past, they should find some way of cooperating with one another for the sake of the country. One of the suggestions was that Jayaprakash Narayan and the Indian Socialist Party should take up the responsibility of managing and ruling one of the Indian States according to the basis and pattern they preferred, and if they so agreed, arrangements could be made for the necessary modification by the Government.

I saw a copy of Sardar Vallabhbhai's letter to Shri Jayaprakash Narayan some 15 years ago in Sardar's papers at Ahmedabad. This letter should still be there and I expect its original – which must have been received by Jayaprakashji – must be in his papers either in Delhi or in Patna. I am, however, not aware of what response was made to Sardar's letter by Shri Jayaprakash Narayan.

Similar talks seem to have taken place between some of the remaining leaders of the Gandhian or Sarvodaya movements around 1948 till about 1952. Two or three of the Gandhian leaders including Shri Ramdas Gandhi and Mira behn wished to set-up an autonomous region or two, say in Jharkhand, or amongst the Santhals, with a socio-political, economic, indigenous base and with the support of the local people. The proposal even seems to have been offered some degree of autonomy by the central government to such units around 1949–1950. But leaders like Shri J.C. Kumarappa did not seem to agree to the idea: they thought there was some catch in it and therefore ignored it altogether. The offer must have died by about 1952. Some material on this latter subject may be seen in the Kumarappa and Mira behn papers and other papers in the Nehru Museum in Delhi.

culture had committed and sanctioned even greater violence and injustice against its own people as well. In such a culture no one's self respect could remain safe. While Gandhiji was thinking about setting up new systems, he was as much concerned about the self esteem of the people of the West as he was about his own people. He was confident that after realising his dreams for India, he would also certainly find a way to save the West.

If we are unable to summon up the required courage to realise Gandhiji's dream in the ways suggested above, then the least we could do is to construct a grand temple to him in Sevagram. Let us link him to our traditions so that he becomes a part of them. Then perhaps he could one day manifest himself through our traditions. The temple, when built, must be very beautiful, with local materials including local stones. The traditional artisans and craftsmen of India should design the structure. It is important that the temple be magnificent even while it remains simple and traditionally Indian. The structure must be at least as large as the Brihadeshwar temple of Tanjore. The story of our country must be engraved on at least 10,000 or 20,000 stone panels. The panels must tell our story from the dawn of our civilisation till we regained our independence in AD 1947.

It may take several years to construct such a grand temple in accordance with indigenous norms. But along with the process of building the temple, the confidence and energy of the Indian people would also get charged. We would regain the capability to create something stunning through our own effort. This grand temple of Gandhiji could become the symbol of the reawakening of India. Gandhiji is the *yugpurush* of the new India. He alone must be deified in this temple and through him, this country and its people. The rest of the gods would be placed around him.

Some people may find it strange to associate grandeur with Gandhiji. But Gandhiji was a follower of simplicity, not of poverty or smallness. He sought grandeur in simplicity and in in-

digenous resources. Mahatma Gandhi lived in a modest hut all his life. The Gandhi *kutir* – where he lived when in Sevagram – tells us how he lived and how he did his great work. But the *kutir* cannot exactly represent his great achievements. A magnificent temple alone – or something of that order – could represent the grandeur of his imagination. A temple, howsoever large, constructed with the help of indigenous resources, craft and traditions is still essentially simple. Actually, when we associate poverty or smallness with Gandhiji, we deny his spirit. We must remember that he was the general of our war for independence. It is true that he built an army on the basis of a dream that was shattered after his death. If we could not create appropriate systems to realise his dreams, the fault is entirely ours. It does not detract in any way from his glory. If we mean to keep his memory alive, then we must acknowledge his victory. Perhaps we fear to acknowledge this, because we would then have to acknowledge ourselves as victors and learn to live accordingly, with confidence and on our own terms. If we were not so full of fear about our victory we would have pulled down India Gate and the statue of George V long ago and built a temple of Gandhiji in their place. The president of our country would have gone there each day to pay his respects. It is not necessary that Gandhiji's temple is built in Sevagram; it could be built at India Gate in Delhi also.

If we are not ready to acknowledge Gandhiji's victory and the singularity of his thought then it is best we give up all attempts to keep his memory alive. One should plant a banyan tree instead in Sevagram. There is already a peepul tree growing there. It is believed that the branches of the peepul tree have inclined in the direction of the spot where Gandhiji used to sit. The memory of Gandhiji remains intact in the peepul tree. The banyan tree will keep this memory alive for a much longer time. Gandhiji was very fond of the peepul tree – the symbol of Indian culture. The peepul tree has tremendous life force. Even after most of it – including its branches – gets destroyed, it still

keeps some form of life within and blooms again whenever it gets the opportunity. So if we cannot do anything else, we could plant a banyan tree then in Sevagram. The banyan tree would not only keep Gandhiji's memory intact, but the banyan tree of Indian culture would bloom once again and embrace this memory into its fold.

How do we understand Mahatma Gandhi? A shrew Bania or a hard-working and ingenious Shudra and Antyajya? Or because of his great public roles, a Kshatriya and a Brahmana? On the other hand, was he not a great general – like Sri Krishna of the Mahabharata?

In these extremely profound and thoughtful essays, Dharampal – one of India's most distinguished historians and writers – offers us his own distilled view of the passions that drove Gandhiji – one of the most awesome individuals of our times.

Obsessed with the personality of Gandhiji ever since – at the age of eight – he first saw him at the 1929 Lahore Congress, Dharampal has over the past four decades pored over everything that Gandhiji ever wrote (now published in the hundred volumes of the *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*). He has also had access to several other notes and letters that Gandhiji wrote but which his followers would not allow him to publish when he was alive.

Dharampal's own *Collected Writings* in five volumes have also been published by Other India Press. His most recent work is *The British Origin of Cow Slaughter in India* (SIDH, Mussoorie, 2002).

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